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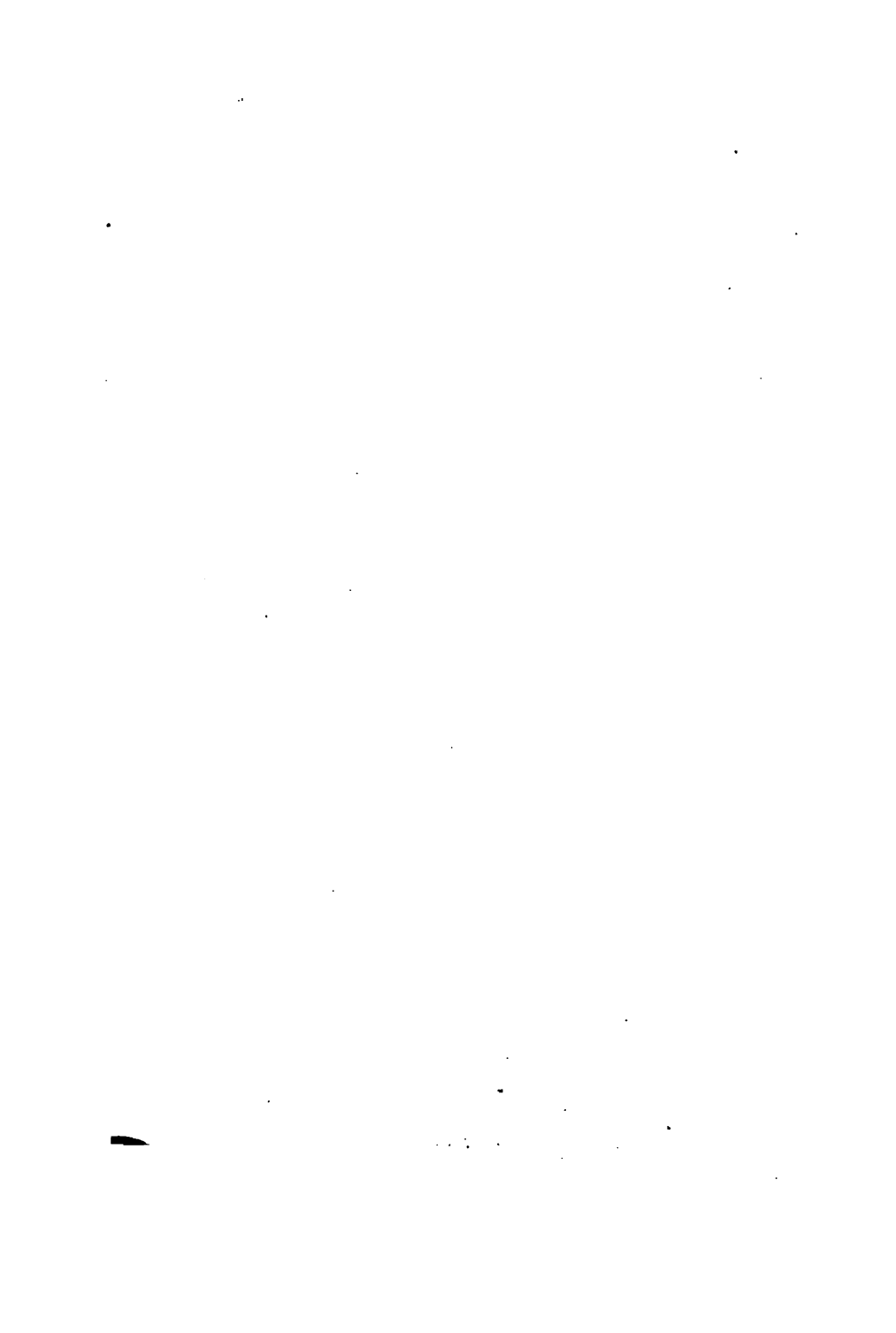
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FREVILLE CHASE.

LONDON : BURNS AND OATES.

FREVILLE CHASE.

BY

E. H. DERING,

AUTHOR OF "SHERBORNE; OR, THE HOUSE AT THE FOUR WAYS,"
"MEMOIRS OF GEORGIANA LADY CHATTERTON,"
ETC. ETC.

Θεὸς οὐδαμῇ οὐδαμῶς ἄδικος, ἀλλ' ὡς οἷόν τε δικαιοτάτος, καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν
αὐτῷ ὁμοιότερον οὐδὲν ἢ ὅς ἂν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν γένηται ὅτι δικαιοτάτος. Περὶ τούτου
καὶ ἡ ὡς ἀληθῶς δεινότης ἀνδρὸς καὶ οὐδένια τε καὶ ἀνανδρία.

—PLATO, *Theætetus*.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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FREVILLE CHASE.

CHAPTER XXI.

EULLY persuaded that there was something in the background, Elfrida insisted on employing all legitimate means to track the woman of the middling countenance. Police inspectors were confidentially questioned in Ledchester, Lyneham and Exbourne; Bolton the carrier, and other itinerant observers of local events reported from the villages; but the result was like a dishonoured cheque: there were no effects. Middling countenances were indeed to be found, and in greater abundance than could be wished; but they were of native growth. Everard, who adhered to his opinion that the mystery was nothing more than a trick to cheat him out of a hundred pounds, took no interest in the search.

In the meanwhile Ida was awaiting his reply to the letter that he had not received. Her state of mind would have given cause for anxiety to any intelligent well-wisher not prejudiced by views

peculiar and personal, such as those of Lady Dytechley and the Marquis Moncalvo. Ida was confident, but her confidence included too much. Instead of concentrating itself on Everard, or rather on the alleged fact regarding him, it took in separable accidents, and, in a manner, pinned her faith on a space of time. Therefore, when the space was narrowing towards its close, and the accidents were unfavourable, she grew restless, became introverted, and lost the freedom of her soul. Lady Dytechley saw this, and seeing no further than her own point of view, smiled in secret. The Marquis watched it from his own, and told himself to hope.

At the end of the ten days, that were supposed to test the truth of the accusation, but only tested the lock of the Marquis's dressing-case, Lady Dytechley looked resigned and sighed at intervals. The next morning she appeared to have grown anxious: the day after she was obtrusively sympathetic. The thirteenth and fourteenth days were devoted to tears and indignant mutterings. On the fifteenth she suddenly exclaimed, "*I believed, and therefore will I speak. I said in my haste, All men are liars.*"

"You are going the way to make me say it deliberately, and believe in nothing else, human or divine," said Ida, in a voice quite unlike her own. "If you can prove to me that Everard is false, you will have succeeded in rooting all faith from my heart. Through faith in him I rose to faith in One True Church, without which life is a puzzle and happiness a quicksand. Through my love for him I grew to love God; and if"——

"You ungrateful girl!" interrupted Lady Dytchley, dropping in her irritation the sympathetic system that she had intended to follow. "You know I taught you all that; but he has made you untrue, like them all. Can you look me in the face and say I didn't?"

"My dear mother, you did not. You taught me that I ought to have faith, but not what it was that I ought to have faith in. You taught me to be afraid of God, but not to love Him. The Catholic Church alone satisfies the cravings of heart and soul; and if it is not true, there is no truth. This last and utterly inconceivable trial has maddened me. I feel as if my will were becoming paralyzed, and I drifting I know not where. If Everard is false to me, I shall cease to believe in anything: I know that I shall. I can't help it. You don't understand me. You don't know what I feel, what I am being driven to. You have no idea of it. You persuade yourself that I can transfer myself just as I am, and that you can bring me back to a Church founded on contradiction. My dear mother, you delude yourself."

"Don't talk to me in that way," said Lady Dytchley, losing her temper, and resorting to highly coloured assertions. "One would really suppose that I had brought it about, and made it all myself, and begged *him* to carry off an Italian girl from her parents and hide her in the tower at Freville Chase."

"If anyone does suppose such a thing, it will not be from any words of mine," said Ida, rising to leave the room. "I never said or implied

that you had done anything. I say that you don't understand me about it. You flatter yourself that I could get over being deceived in Everard; but I could not. I am not saying so in a fit of sudden excitement, but after full consideration; I have had to face it in imagination for the last fortnight continually, as you must know, who have been putting it before me all day long, and telling me that you had positive proofs of its being a fact. I have faced it, thought of it, examined myself on it, and I tell you deliberately that if it were true, I should have no faith in anything—no hope, no charity. In losing him I should lose all. You will say perhaps that I must be mad to talk so. *I am* nearly so."

"You had better be careful," remarked Lady Dytchley's conscience. "But there is his own admission," answered her obstinacy.

"Are you quite sure that you read the letter right? and that Ida's letter reached him?" said prudence. "Remember which way your wishes point," said conscience, "and how curiously they have coincided with the peculiar progress of events during the last two months."

"Well! and what of that?" exclaimed obstinacy and anger in unison. "That only shows how right I was."

Conscience had nothing more to say, but Ida had.

"*I am* mad in a way," said Ida, "mad with worry, but not from any doubts about Everard. Nothing will persuade me to believe that he is different from what I know him to be."

"*My poor, dear child!*" said Lady Dytchley in

a softer tone, "I have tried to break the news to you by degrees; but I see it is of no use. You must know then that my authority was Everard himself."

Ida's lips became white, and every nerve trembled.

"You must have misunderstood him," she said. "I will believe no one but himself."

"Will you believe his own handwriting?"

There was a dead silence for a few seconds, and then Ida turned away to leave the room.

"Will you believe me when I tell you that I have seen and read it in his own handwriting?"

"You don't know what you are doing by all this—you really don't," said Ida, grasping the handle of the door.

"You won't listen. I tell you I have seen and read it myself."

"I can't help what you have seen. You will know what you have done, when it is too late."

"It really is," began Lady Dytchley, rising from her chair, "it really is too"—

The door closed on the adverb, but it came out on the inside. "Trying" was the word, and it was well chosen, for it appeared to try her temper as well as her resources.

"Nothing *will* persuade her," she said aloud. "She must see the letter. He *must* let me have it. He will be here presently."

Soon afterwards he, that is the Marquis Moncalvo, was announced.

"Oh!" she said, "I wanted to see you so much."

"I would have come sooner, said he, "if I had known"——

"Thank you: it will do very well now. Would you kindly show me that letter once more—Everard Freville's I mean? It is important that I should. I am very sorry to give you so much trouble; but really it is of the utmost importance to me and to Ida. Thank you: it is so kind and considerate, as you always are. I am *so* sorry to give you the trouble, though."

The door had opened itself behind him, and she was looking outwards, as if he were walking away.

"So *very* kind of you," said she.

A voice from his temporal or outer conscience, where the principle, *Noblesse oblige*, dwelt in retirement, made a faint objection; but he had gone too far about letters to hesitate now.

"It is not my fault," thought he, in reply. "It was an accident; and she may as well read the letter twice as once."

"But you ought to have told her," said his outer conscience, "that she had misunderstood the half sheets, and that the other two would exculpate Everard."

"And ruin myself by showing them, ruin myself for ever!"

"Refuse to show them then, but don't calumniate Everard."

"I have not accused him"——

"You have, implicitly, by silence and shrugs."

"*Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n!*" suggested some one, not visible.

The temporal conscience was silenced, and the *spiritual* had been so puzzled of late by the strange

things advocated in its name, that it knew not what to say.

By this time—for the remonstrances and their answers had repeated themselves often—he was in his own sitting-room, opening the dressing-case. The number of letters there had increased since the four half-sheets of Everard's were stowed away with Ida's, fifteen days before. Four from Everard to Ida had found their way in since then, and the Marquis, as he looked at them, explained the cause of their presence.

"Lady Dytechley *would* ask me to call at the Post Office," he said to himself, "and she said that his letters were doing so much harm. 'They are killing her,' she said. How could I take them to her, knowing that?"

"Do you believe it?" asked his temporal conscience: but he considered the question inopportune, and proceeded to select the two half-sheets that fitted into his own requirements and those of Lady Dytechley.

"Oh! You, You—don't force me to say what," groaned the temporal conscience, whose watchword was *noblesse oblige*. "Consider who you are. At least, don't cheat like a card-sharper."

"But how am I to get out of it?" objected the Marquis, putting the selected half-sheets into his pocket.

"Say that you inadvertently let her see it because she had it in her hand. Tell her that the odd half-sheets altered the sense, and burn the whole to get out of showing it."

"And lose my only chance, once and for ever."

"Would you *fall so low*?"

"I *have* fallen so low. All evil is low and mean. I have but one hope of rising from the abyss. Am I to let myself sink for ever? *Non posso, non debbo, non voglio.*"

With these curiously misapplied words of the saintly Pontiff, Pius IX., he closed the question, and returned whence he came.

Lady Dytechley was grateful, and so was he; but the difference was that she was grateful to him as helping the rejected Exmore, and he to her for helping himself. In both cases the gratitude was undeserved.

"I am *so* much obliged to you," she said. "But do you mind waiting a few minutes? I have to see some one in the next room. I will be back directly."

The Marquis was left alone with his temporal conscience, which teased him much about Lady Dytechley's use of the half letter, and called him an accomplice before the fact. He sat uneasily, stood in a shrinking posture, walked up and down loosely, and muttered :

"I know it. All evil is low and mean; and every act, every thought, that has an evil origin must be low and mean, however dignified it may be made to appear. It all comes from the devil, the father of lies, the lowest and meanest of beings. But what is this last shame, in comparison with the hope of rising from the abyss? For years I have lived on shame, fed on shame and shall I reject it now, when I see it offered as the price of my only hope, lying, as it were, between me and the Grace of God?"

"It certainly does lie between you and the

Grace of God," whispered a very small voice further within. "Grace from the God of Truth will not pass through falsehood into your soul."

"No; but when it is a *fait accompli*, and I doing my utmost in every way to make amends for what is past"—

"Like a man giving alms out of the profits of a swindle. Do you think that you can cheat Almighty God?"

"How can it be that, when there is no other possibility of being able to do right? He would make another way of escape, if this were sinful."

The little repressed voice made a little inarticulate protest, and relapsed into silence. In the meanwhile (for the interior dispute had been compressed into a short space of time) Lady Dythchley, having entered Ida's room, was holding in her hand the selected half-sheets.

"Here is the letter I told you of," she said. "You wouldn't believe me, and so I had to get him to bring it—a very disagreeable thing for me, and for him too. You will see by this that he tried all he could to keep him straight."

"Which is which? I don't understand," said Ida.

"Look here then: here is his own handwriting. I won't ask you any more to take my word. Look and see for yourself. Do you see whose writing it is?"

"I do," said Ida, in an unnaturally calm voice. "I don't believe a word of it. I couldn't if I would, and I wouldn't if I could. But please don't keep me in suspense. You mustn't, indeed. I can't bear it."

These last suggestive words brought out the sympathetic element in Lady Dytechley's composite state of mind.

"My poor, dear child!" she said with much warmth and no fatness of tone, "it breaks my heart to show you this; but what can I do? You see how he makes light of the disgraceful riot in the lane when he carried off an Italian girl from her friends. He calls it 'a serio-comic affair!' You will find further on that she was an Italian girl. The Marquis Moncalvo had remonstrated with him about it, and tried to induce him to let her go back to her parents. You will see what sort of an answer he gives:

'I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy. Nor can I send her away—looking at her past history.'—And what a history!—*'I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it.'*—Claims it! You see the hold she has over him. Oh! it is too dreadful.—*'That protection she shall have.'*—And if you had married him two months ago, as you would, but for my care, think what you would have found! Imagine the horrible disenchantment! Then he speaks of a light seen in the tower, and he says, with a coolness that one can hardly believe possible, *'She was concealed there then, but now lives openly in my house with the servants'*—with the servants! I really can't make any comment on that—*'and cannot possibly be a cause of suspicion (as you suggest that she might be) to Miss Dytechley.'*"

"Of course not," said Ida angrily. "I can't think how you can believe him capable of acting

so—an Italian girl carried off from her friends close to Freville Chase, when there isn't an Italian within ten miles! The story is monstrous."

"But, my darling, the girl who was frightened in the lane is the same who was concealed in the tower—read it and see. How do you account for that?"

"I don't want to account for anything. He will tell all about it when I see him."

"When you see him! How can you say that, when you have written to him, imploring him to come, and he won't, and hasn't even written a line, though it is now a fortnight ago and more. Here we are now at the 1st of November! You *know* that he received that letter, for Elfrida told you, the last time she wrote, that *he had* received your letter posted on the 12th of October (that was the very day when I first told you of it), and she said that he was out of spirits—no wonder! and I told her, when I wrote last week, that you were expecting to hear from him. He never has been so long before without writing—never. His silence, as well as everything else, proves that he is so ashamed at being found out, he doesn't know what to say! Now read this—it will make the whole thing dreadfully clear to you.

. . . '*But I really do not care*'—that could only be because he felt sure of you, for he speaks about the advantage of your fortune in the next sentence—'*and cannot see the beauty you speak of*'—He to be the only one who doesn't see it! and to say so coolly, as if he were looking through an opera-glass at some one in the opposite box! I told him, the last time I saw him, that he only

cared for your money, and here he tells him so. '*But she seems likely to be a good wife*' (how very condescending), *and her fortune will restore the old place.*' Of course it would. It was meant from the beginning to do that. I knew all along how it was, and his father's object about it, and how the priests made it up, and your father didn't see through it. And I told *him* so, and what he was at. But he can deceive you no longer. You have the proofs before you in his own handwriting. '*In the same net which they hid privily is their foot taken.*' Oh! you ought to be so thankful. And only think how I found it out—it was quite providential. He had just read it and put it into his pocket, and in pulling out his handkerchief when I upset the flowers, out it came, without his knowing it, and when I picked it up after he had gone, I accidentally saw enough to make me insist on seeing the whole. He was very much annoyed at showing me the letter, and tried to defend Everard; but he saw that I had a right to demand it. I am sure he has behaved beautifully about it all—so delicate about Everard and so just-minded towards us! and never said a word about having tried to reclaim him, but only tried to turn it off! and he was so vexed when I told him just now that I *must* see it again. I was quite sorry for him. So very painful, you know, to a man with his punctilious ideas of honour! But I couldn't help it. You wouldn't have believed it without, and I was obliged to insist. Poor fellow! He felt it terribly; but he saw that I had a right to demand *it*, and he gave in. You must let me give it him

back now. We have no right to keep it. It really is too hard upon him to be placed in so disagreeable a position through no fault of his own."

These after-comments were well meant for their purpose, but they were unheeded, unheard. The last sentence in the letter had done its work.

"You poor, dear child," she said, becoming suddenly alarmed at the strange expression on Ida's face. "Oh! don't look like that. Listen to me a moment. Things may not be so bad as they seem—they really may be different."

"It is too late," said Ida with terrible distinctness. "He has written it."

Her voice was thin and wiry: her features were rigid, and had hardened into sharp outlines: her eyes looked into vacancy, and hope was not in them.

"Ida, for God's sake, be reasonable and listen to me! I am going to explain it, I really am. I can make it clear, if you will attend. I understand it all now, I do indeed. I have been wrong, I know I have, and I have misunderstood you, and him, and everything."

Ida heard the words, but took no impression of their meaning.

"It is too late!" she repeated. "He has written it."

"Ida, Ida, don't be so hard and proud! I am sure you never learned that from Everard nor from his faith."

"His faith? Yes, I remember; but it seems far off. It was a part of him, and of me through and with him. It has all passed away."

"Oh! this is awful, and I have been the cause of it! I was against him, on account of religion, and I was too ready to believe anything that appeared to be against him. Why you saw yourself how absurd the thing was. There must be some mistake. Write to him. That stupid courier may have forgotten to post your letter. I will take care that this one goes."

"But he says he doesn't care for me. I should never have believed the story without that."

"Yes, but I daresay he wrote in a hurry (in fact he says so) and left out something that would give a different meaning."

"If I could only believe that it is as you say! But all belief has been so shaken. And how can those dreadful words, there, at the end, have any other meaning?"

"Believe me, they may. Take your mother's advice, and write at once."

Ida seized a pen, and throwing herself into the nearest chair, wrote :

"If you ever cared for me, if you do not wish to break my heart and drive me to despair, come here directly, without losing a moment. My mother too wishes you to come. I wrote more than a fortnight ago, and implored you to come, and you have neither come nor written, though my letter was about such dreadful things"——

"I wouldn't mention that you have seen this one," suggested Lady Dytchley—"it would look as if the Marquis Moncalvo had shown it, whereas it was all my doing—and you can explain the whole thing so much better when you see him."

"There is no occasion to mention it," said Ida, continuing to write. "If he has not deceived me about himself, I will not deceive him about that."

There was such bitterness in the tone of her voice, that Lady Dytchley, startled at first, after a little reflection said to herself:

"If she can but be angry with him like that, she will get over it, and all will be for the best."

"Here it is! What shall I do with it?" said Ida, tearing a seal-ring from her finger, and making a shapeless impression with it on the wax.

"If you will give it to me," said Lady Dytchley, "I will take care that it goes. Would you like to drive anywhere to-day?"

"No, please not. I only ask to be alone."

"I think you are quite right, my dear child. You want repose."

"Repose! where am I to find it?"

"This is not genuine anger," thought Lady Dytchley, again becoming alarmed. "I see," she said. "It will be so long to wait."

Ida looked up, but remained silent. There was neither intelligence nor feeling in her eyes.

Lady Dytchley moved by degrees towards the door, feeling anxious and yet resenting the unaccepted humiliation of being unable to control what she had aroused. The amount of humiliation would not seem to be much, compared with the anxiety; but it appeared so to her because it was new.

The Marquis was passing a *mauvais quart d'heure* in his own society when she re-entered the sitting-

room, for his temporal conscience had obliged him to ask more than once what he thought of himself while the false evidence that consent had made his own was doing its deed of darkness against Everard Freville.

"Oh! I am so sorry to have kept you," she said, slipping the two half-sheets into his hand. "Thank you very much. I do think it so kind of you."

The Marquis bowed vaguely, and tried to turn the conversation; but she interrupted him with the question:

"Would you do one thing more for me? I want to be sure that this letter goes; and the courier is so tiresome and stupid, and I can't go out myself this afternoon. Would you post it? But really it is troubling you so very much."

"It will be no trouble at all," said the Marquis carelessly.

"Well then, if you would be so kind—I should feel it off my mind. Here it is."

"I had better, perhaps, take it now," said he, putting the letter into his pocket with the two selected half-sheets.

"Thank you so very much; but there is plenty of time yet. Well, perhaps it would be better."

"*Frappez vite et frappez fort*," said his temporal conscience, taking to sarcasm as a last resource while he was taking the nearest way to his own rooms. "Finish the work, and see what will come of it."

"There is no alternative," he muttered, walking faster; and being a well-read man in several languages, he quoted from Richard III.:

"All unavoided is the doom of Destiny."

A voice within whispered the next line :

"True : when avoided grace makes Destiny."

"Do it! suppress her letter to Everard, and see how she will thank you when she discovers it!" He shuddered, but hurried on, refusing to think.


Lady Dytchley remained at home, meditating on the progress of circumstances and speculating with unwonted diffidence on the result.

"I don't understand Ida," she thought repeatedly : which was and always had been true. "She has become so unlike herself, so hard and proud, and doesn't care for Everard at all."

But the unnatural hardness had melted, like an icicle before the sun. Ida, in her own room, was sobbing with a violence that would seem too intense to last, and yet it lasted long without becoming less.

CHAPTER XXII.

*"Was ever woman in this humour woo'd?
Was ever woman in this humour won?"*

HE Marquis Moncalvo, who was acquiring an inclination to cite Shakespeare to his purpose, but sometimes found that Shakespeare cited him, as, for instance, in the words—

"Yes; when avoided grace makes destiny."

remembered these two lines when he was about to call on Lady Dytechley, in Rome, ten days afterwards, and wished that he had not remembered them. The question was indeed obvious, and, unlike Grace, could not be avoided; but he would have preferred asking it himself, instead of through Richard III., for his temporal conscience had taken to Shakespeare, and went on with partly-quoted bits of the speech, interspersed with comments, thus:—"How would you like

'To take her in her heart's extremest hate,'

which you will only find out when she has found you out, and reproaches you, as only an injured woman can, having 'God, her conscience, and' these letters against you? You know what *Everard* is by nature and by grace:—

*'A sweeter and a lovelier gentleman
Framed in the prodigality of nature—
The spacious world cannot again afford:
And will she yet abase her eyes on you
On you, whose all not equals "Everard's" moiety?'*

What is the difference between your conduct and that of Richard III.? He stabbed the Prince of Wales with a dagger; you stab Everard with a lie. He woo'd the widow afterwards; you scheme to do so beforehand, and contrive a deed of treachery for the purpose. In that respect you are the worst of the two."

This unexpected comparison of himself, "a marvellous proper man," with the misshapen Duke of Glo'ster, trying to win the widow of the Prince he had stabbed in his "angry mood at Tewkesbury," startled and convinced, but did not persuade him. It was the last word of his temporal conscience, and he left the echo of it behind him on the Pincian Hill, which he slowly descended, clinging to his purpose.

Lady Dytchley had arrived the day before, having come to Rome because Lady Oxborough and her son were there, and left Florence because Everard was not there. She was pitiaibly bewildered, being unable to understand Ida's new state of mind, settle her own, or see her way through the confusion she had created. She felt that all was going wrong, suspected some foul play about Everard, and told herself in private that, all things considered, she had made mistakes; but her regret at the failure of her pet project was such "sweet sorrow," that she came to Rome for the purpose of indulging in it with prudence and remedial care. A blind optimism,

born of obstinacy, had so far restored her shaken self-confidence.

Ida was in a state of mind that would have dispelled optimism and aroused grave misapprehensions, if the pet project had not stood in the way, casting false lights and shadows. But the pet project had only been mourned, not abandoned; and it revived by degrees during the journey from Florence. They had not been many hours in Rome when symptoms of its revival showed themselves, and the symptoms appeared while the Marquis Moncalvo was hearing the last word of his temporal conscience on the Pincian Hill. Lady Dytchley came, much dressed, into their sitting-room at the hotel—it matters not which—and said, “I thought you were ready.”

“What for?” said Ida, raising her eyes wearily from one of those regenerative newspapers that call themselves moderate.

Lady Dytchley hesitated, and began to feel very uncomfortable. The change wrought in an instant by the last sentence of Everard’s letter to the Marquis Moncalvo was more striking now than when it frightened her out of her self-satisfaction at Florence. Veiled by a reserve that passed for gradual consent, it had increased unperceived, and, like a tree on which the dead leaves have hung as long as the heavy stillness of autumn kept them motionless, began to show at the first breath that what had been was not.

“Well, my dear,” said Lady Dytchley in a persuasive tone, “I thought we were going to call, you know, on—but never mind, if you feel tired.”

"I don't feel at all tired," said Ida, "not the least. I never felt less so."

The answer had the effect of reassuring Lady Dytchley, by reason of her great desire to be reassured; yet Ida's voice alone might have made anyone pause and think. The soft melodious ring, that used to be softer and more intense when Everard was by, had become a hard metallic sound, harder when his name was mentioned. The old tones had left no trace. There was nothing to tell that they had once been, except their absence and the hearer's memory.

"I keep saying that I am not at all tired, never was so quite entirely the reverse of tired," she said, throwing the regenerative journal on the top of *Janus*, *Le Maudit*, and other obsolete aids to apostacy, that were lying about.

The sound was not encouraging, but the words were interpreted in a favourable sense by Lady Dytchley, who was unable to suppose that her own daughter could be quite entirely the reverse of tired, if unwilling to call on the only friends they knew to be in Rome.

"I am so glad," she said; "I was afraid that the journey and all"——

"I never was better in my life," said Ida; and so thought Lady Dytchley, who had noticed the return of colour in her cheeks without perceiving that it was the protracted flush of excitement.

There was an ominous pause. Lady Dytchley hesitated and wished that somebody were there to make the suggestion for her.

"I will get ready," said Ida, springing up suddenly, and pushing back her golden hair with an

impatient sweep of her hand ; " but I should like to know where we are going."

" I was only thinking," said Lady Dytchley, " that I should like to see—but never mind about it to-day. It will be soon enough to-morrow. I want, of course, to see dear Lady Oxborough."

" Is *he* there?" asked Ida, and, for the first time since the reading of the selected half-sheets, her voice betrayed some emotion.

" I knew that she would appreciate him at last," thought Lady Dytchley.

" Is he there?" repeated Ida, looking fixedly on the ground.

" Yes, he is," answered Lady Dytchley, after pausing to enjoy the prospective triumph. " He is there, and in a very sad state. He is quite broken-hearted about you."

" How very interesting! But hearts don't break when there is nothing to break for."

" Oh! how can you say that his had nothing to break for? You must allow him to be the best judge."

" I say there was nothing, is nothing. Love has a double life. If not returned, it dies out; and if betrayed, it withers with the heart that was once its home."

" Why, she talks like a tragic actress," thought Lady Dytchley. " I don't know what to do with her, nor what to think, nor what to be at. I don't see my way out of it. Was anyone ever so beset?"

There was poetic justice in these words, for they were Sir Richard's after she had made him run away from the settlements, the responsi-

bility and his luncheon. Strength founded on the weakness of some, the dependence of others and the concurrence of circumstances, breaks down utterly when the conditions are suspended. She was as helpless as Sir Richard, and stared at Ida with a kind of superstitious awe, as if some preternatural power had worked the change that was but too evident.

"She talks like a tragic actress," was the burden of her complaint, "and looks like one, stands like one! I never could have believed that she could have come to that."

And yet it was a very simple thing to understand. On the stage nature is represented by art, and in the great tragedies of real life the player's art is represented by nature. Otherwise tragic art would not be true to nature, as in its perfection it is, and as nature shows it to be whenever human suffering overpowers habit. Ida's words and manner were tragic because her life was then a tragedy.

"I repeat," she said, "that if not returned, it dies out. His must have died out, if there ever was any life in it."

"Oh! but there really was—I do assure you there was, indeed," said Lady Dytechley, brightening up at the idea of there being a question of any kind about him.

"Then," said Ida; "it is certain that we ought not to meet. I have no feeling of anger against him now. I had once; but that is past, with all that made me what I was. I speak on his account, not on my own; for I would as soon see him as anyone else."

Lady Dytchley became urgent. "Why not see him then?" she said. "It won't commit you in the least. And when they don't know—anything. And really he is *so* good, and *so* true, and *so* affectionate, and *so* everything that could be wished in every way, so superior to other young men, and thinks nothing of himself, with everybody making up to him, that, if things had been different"——

"What might have happened if I had been somebody else," interrupted Ida impatiently, "I don't know, and don't care to know; but being what I am, I can only say that nothing could make me tolerate him."

"But, my dear, I never supposed or wished that just now"——

"It matters not whether you meant now or later. Time has nothing to do with me now, nor will have henceforth, except to make me grow older. It moves towards me, not with and around me. That immense love which has made and unmade me as a woman and as a Christian"——

"My dear! Really you know! One would think I was a Unitarian"——

"Hear me or not, as you please; but, if I am to speak, I must say what I mean. I referred to myself, not to you nor to anyone else. That immense love, which has made and unmade me as a woman and as a Christian, withered as soon as I became certain that it had been betrayed, withered and died because there was no longer anything to give it life; but memory remains, and the power of comparing, and sense to distinguish great qualities (though they only aggravate my

wrongs) from small ones industriously used, and still more industriously trumpeted. The best and most complete man I have ever known or could imagine has been false to me, and I no longer believe in goodness. I will have nothing to do with it, nor with anyone who affects it—least of all, a goody young man who is held up as a pattern because he happens to have no character of his own.”

“He is nothing of the kind,” said her mother, roused to a sense of dignity and interior warmth. “I am surprised that you can speak so, quite. Well then, I must go by myself, I suppose. I shall not be long.”

The skirts of her dress trailed onwards and disappeared through the doorway. Ida smiled, but her smile was like the lines of light that break in hard streaks behind a snow-laden sky, cold and stormy.

“I warned her that it would come to this if it went on,” she said to herself, at first aloud, and then in thought. “I felt it before, I believed that it could be, and I struggled against it; but she would have it, and now she is sorry when it is too late. What nonsense I am supposing! Her wishing it so couldn’t make him write that letter, feel what I saw written in that letter. But he did write it, did feel what he wrote; for I have seen it. Some one told me once of a German philosopher who made out, if I remember correctly, that one’s existence is all imagination. I wondered at the time how one could be able to imagine, if one didn’t really exist; but now I half believe it. I have lived in a dream. All the goodness, the

beauty, the hopes that I believed in were unreal; and if nothing is real, one must be carried along by the dream of the moment, whatever it may be. Fool! Don't I know that I am sitting here, that I read his letter, that my heart, once so loving, was turned by that letter into stone?

"Imagination! I have none left in me. The poetry of life is gone with the hope that made it. Hope? That means the one great delusion, which has falsified part of my life and unfitted me for the rest. What a far-off sound it is! The thing it means was but of yesterday, and yet I cannot realise it. If *he* could do this, what are goodness and truth? what are evil and falsehood? Where is the difference? And if there is none, if all that appeals most convincingly to the mind, the heart, the soul, is a mere delusion, what then?"

Weary and heart-sick, seeking relief from her sorrow by clinging proudly to her wrongs, shutting her eyes by an unnatural effort of overbalanced will to the last ray of hope that glimmered from time to time through the darkness of apparent evidence against Everard, she began to read one of the pseudo-Catholic books that her mother had latterly thrown in her way with a view to facilitate the pet project. She read for awhile, laid the book down, and said to herself:

"It only shows that the Catholic Church has been kept up by scheming and deception; and this" (here she took up a popular preservative against Popery)—"this proves that there is no truth about religion, by showing that the Church never was founded at all. For the Gospel tells us, as *from Divine authority*, that the gates of hell shall

not prevail against it, while this book shows that it did, and very soon. What then? Where was the pure stream to come from, when the fountain had been poisoned? From the Bible, they say. And where did they get the Bible from? From a Church that was a mass of lies and corruption. A fine guarantee! My mother may be satisfied with that, but I cannot. If the trunk has no life, I am not going to lean on dead branches and scattered twigs. There is only one religion possible—at least I once thought it was, yes! and believed it was.”

Something stronger than her will forced her to add, “And could now, if I would, if I were not so hard and proud;” but she drove the thought from her and substituted, “not now, not now, never again. It is gone for ever, gone with *him*. I felt it false when I found him false. Truth was lost with him. Lost? It never was, for he never was. If he had been, he must have remained for me. My love was so enormous—and his too, as I believed it to be—that this could never have happened, if he had ever been what I thought him. It was a beautiful dream. Beautiful! I hardly know what that means now, in any sense. People used to call me beautiful, and I never cared about it, except for *him*. I did, for his sake, not supposing him to care for me on that account, but wishing him to possess all that is thought to be worth possessing. And now even that goes away like the rest. I never looked much in the glass, but I can see the difference now.”

She rose and walked across the room to a mirror over the *chimney-piece*.

"I begin to think that I dreamt of myself, as well as of him:" she thought. "Is that my face?"

The Marquis Moncalvo, who was then announced, felt quite sure that it was, and thought it more attractive than ever; but he had reasons of his own for thinking that, and they passed through his mind in an instant as he entered the room. Good and evil were strangely mingled in the second nature which he had acquired by a long course of compromise with himself. They had formed a coalition, in which evil was modestly contented to be anonymous, and they now prompted him to rejoice indistinctly at the terrible change.

"There is hope for me now," he thought or felt; "for she is nearer my own level. But this will pass away with the occasion, and then she will raise me to what I once was." Those were his reasons for thinking her more attractive than ever. The attraction, like that of a magnet, had increased by nearness.

Ida was still looking at the glass, attracted by the expression of her own face there, which fascinated her by the force of hard contrast and encouraged her artificial state of feeling by seeming to have become natural. The waiter had shut the door, and the Marquis was standing close behind her unnoticed.

"No one would venture to call *that* beautiful," she said at last with a bitter laugh, as she turned away.

"Not when speaking to you," said the Marquis in a low voice, keeping his eyes respectfully from hers. "Compliments deserved are an impertinence, or at least they take off half the value of the

homage by seeming to imply that the speaker thinks it worth acceptance."

Ida coloured slightly, being taken by surprise, but at once fell back into the state of forced calmness that she was trying to make her own.

"You have caught me talking to myself about myself," she said, "and looking at myself in the glass too. I never was in the habit of doing either; but the sight of myself rather interested me just now, as a matter of curiosity, to see what one comes to. You are fond of Shakespeare?"

The Marquis acknowledged that he was, and remembered uncomfortably the passage about avoided Grace.

"I have read very little of him," said she, "but I do recollect something that puts a parody into my head."

The Marquis turned pale as he watched the hard, sarcastic lines of her mouth, and wondered how that mouth could be hers. "This is the end of my hopes," he thought; "and they end in contempt."

"The parody is against myself," said Ida. "Some are born old, like that man with red whiskers, who never was young, some achieve oldness in the natural course of things, and some have oldness thrust upon them by disenchantments that take the bloom of life away. I have experienced that, and I was noting down the result in my mind when you came into the room. I tell you this, to explain what must have looked very odd." "Very odd," she repeated in a pettish tone. The poor child was in a temper, and angry with it for having led her unawares to betray her feelings through a flimsy veil of general indifference.

"I had reasons for not wishing to come here," she said, "and I felt annoyed at everything, and talked nonsense. I must beg you to forget that you overheard me talking such rubbish."

"I cannot," said the Marquis, feeling that he was at the crisis of his fate. "I cannot forget what I did not hear"——

"But you *must* have heard me"——

"Not talking nonsense: you never did and never would do that. I heard you depreciate your own (forgive my apparent presumption) your own beauty, because you thought that your noble heart was not valued. That cry of nature was not only touching, it was sublime. Forgive me. I am not worthy to say so much to you."

This reverential sympathy softened the surface, though it could not penetrate beneath.

"I don't know why not," she said, "if you can think it; but I am unable to understand how you can. I can see nothing sublime in finding out hollowness and feeling weary at the sight."

The Marquis was usually opportune in his answers, but he could discover no opportunity for himself in this vague reference. The discovery of hollowness and the prospect inside was almost as difficult to make sense of as the famous question, "whether a chimera buzzing in a vacuum can eat second intentions:" but time, that could not be recalled, was passing at its own unchangeable pace, and in a few moments Lady Dytechley might interrupt him with a smile of welcome. He felt that, if there was any hope, it hung on the moments that were escaping him, or rather on the abnormal and forced condition of her mind

at that time, a condition far too unnatural to last. He drew a deep breath as silently as he could, and rushed at his fate.

"I, too," he said, "have felt the weariness of disenchantment. I have sought in vain what would satisfy the aspirations of my heart. I have hoped for it, longed for it, despaired of it, and yet I never really knew what it was to despair of happiness till now—now, since I have found the impersonation of my own ideal, and felt how unworthy I am of it. I feel it so deeply that, if another feeling were not stronger than myself, I should creep away and hide my hopeless misery in some obscure corner of the earth, where I could exist unknown and die unnoticed. But I feel that this is the crisis of two lives. I know that I am not worthy of you, but I know that younger men are still less so. They have not had the experience of hope unfulfilled, of an ideal unrealised. Your noble and sensitive nature will not bear a cold or an incomplete affection, nor even the suspicion of it. Drive me from you, if such is your will, and you shall never more be wearied by my presence; but hear me for one moment. I have loved you hopelessly, at an immeasurable distance, ever since I first saw you at Netherwood. You will, I think, allow, that as long as circumstances forbade the thought, I kept my torturing secret with irreproachable loyalty—so much so, that no one did or could imagine or suspect the truth. Is it not so?"

"It is, indeed," said Ida. "Nothing surprises me now; but I certainly was not prepared to hear this."

Nor was the Marquis prepared to hear such a quiet acknowledgment of his fervid proposal. He was prepared to be refused, prepared to appeal against a refusal with all the eloquence of despair, as long as she would listen; but the calmness of her manner, so intense and yet so cold, nearly reduced him to silence.

"It would have been better for you," she said, "if you had kept that secret permanently, and let the unfortunate fancy die out, like a dried-up flower, for want of nourishment. It may be all you say—I don't doubt it; but it was ill-omened from the beginning, for its only possible chance lay in wrong and desolation, its only possible hope in the despair of its object. I am not blaming you; but so it is. Go and forget the bad dream—it is nothing else. You know not what you seek. Be reasonable and save me the pain of answering for myself. Be assured that you would find yourself horribly disenchanted. You think of me as I was, and see me so in imagination; but you deceive yourself. If my heart were what it was, it would be *his*—I tell you it would be *his*—but now it is withered. It was made to be his, and it cannot be another's. I warn you solemnly, at your own peril and mine, to desist from pressing the subject any further. I have been maddened by wrongs, and know not what I might be provoked into doing in my recklessness. Leave me in my misery, and don't persist in trying to bring bitter disappointment on yourself."

"But I care not what I risk, what I lose, what I do, for your sake," said the Marquis. "I only ask" —

"Then do this one thing, if you can, one heroic act. Show me, make me feel, that I have in some strange way misunderstood him. Make me feel that the story is false, that the letter he wrote to you at Florence meant something different from what it appeared to mean. Make me feel this, make me know that there may be some sufficient reason why he has never come, nor telegraphed, nor written. Do this, and you will do an heroic act, at the cheap cost of avoiding disappointment, perhaps remorse. You would not find remorse pleasant, you would not indeed."

That word had an ominous sound for the Marquis. It stirred his conscience, both spiritual and temporal. But he made a great effort, and said:

"Remorse! Why should I feel remorse?"

"I don't know," said Ida; "but I have a feeling that you will, if you stay here and persist in exciting my recklessness or mad perversity. I *am* maddened and reckless, and can't answer for what I may be provoked into doing. Listen to me!—I did to you when you asked me. I can't tell you why, but I feel as if you could do something for me—I don't know what. If you could but prove that I have misunderstood that letter, if you would but find a reason why I have not heard from him—why he will not come?"

The Marquis was silent for some moments, and his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"What can I tell you?" he said; and his utterance was almost inarticulate with conflicting emotions. "What can I do? Anything in the world that is possible, I will do for you; but"——

"Do you mean that you know of nothing that would — make it different?" she said after a long pause. Her voice was hoarse and tremulous, her face bloodless, her eyes veiled by tears that would not flow.

The Marquis had one last and decisive struggle with his better and truer nature. The result seemed almost doubtful, so strongly did even perverted honour and unpractised religion appeal to what he had once been and might be again. Even necessity, that knows no law where it is genuine, and makes its own laws where it is false, yielded a little before the helplessness of the unhappy girl whose life he was blighting by a prolonged act of treachery. He hesitated for a moment, whether in truth or in sentimental theory it is hard to say; but while he did so, Ida spoke again.

"Can't you, then, tell me anything to comfort me?" she said, "anything about him—Everard?"

It was the first time she had pronounced his name for six weeks. The sound of that name and the tone of her voice kindled the white heat of jealousy, ever hottest where the injustice of the cause is most clear. Hatred entered into his heart: conscience was paralysed by passion.

"What can I say?" he answered, looking on the ground and seeming to speak unwillingly. "You have read the letter that Lady Dytechley picked up by accident and — thought fit to examine. She insisted on taking it from me: she showed it to you. Do not, I entreat you, ask me to say more—it would place me in such a terrible position. Spare me that at least. Lady Dytechley's principal ground of complaint was, that

by his engagement he had spoiled one of the best matches in England—those were her words—and she gave me to understand who it was, and why she meant to come here. She implied that she would never rest until—I cannot finish the sentence—until she had made it up. But perhaps—oh! tell me if it is so, and you shall see me no more. Perhaps you—perhaps I ought not to”——

“It never can, never shall be made up,” said Ida passionately. “He has haunted me like a spectre, either himself or his name, ever since I left England. It never can, never shall be!”

“It is her fixed idea,” said the Marquis, his voice trembling with emotion of many kinds and a nervous dread of encountering Lady Dytechley at that inopportune moment. “She has come to Rome for that purpose only, and will not abandon it as long as it seems possible; which means, in her mind, as long as there is no visible barrier. I know, from what she told me, that she will continue hoping for it, believing that you will sooner or later yield, and constantly endeavouring to persuade you.”

“She will, as long as she can,” thought Ida, every nerve and every pulse trembling like leaves before a storm. “She will, as long as the power remains; and that power is in my hands. I cannot endure it. I cannot bear to hear of him—he excites me to madness. He has haunted me all through this slow torture, like an evil genius; and now, when all is over, he is to appear again, and try to galvanise the dead heart for himself. Never shall he have the chance, never!”

"Was it wrong of me to warn you?" said the Marquis, raising his eyes deferentially towards hers.

"Wrong? Oh no! I should have thought it strange if you had concealed that."

"Strange indeed it would have been, if I had or could have deceived you on such a subject."

"I cannot endure it. I shall shut myself up and see no one, or leave home and go away, I know not where."

"What can I say or do? Oh, if I had but the right to protect you!"

Ida's lips became compressed and white, her face ashy pale, her features and attitude rigid, as if she were walking in her sleep.

"You shall, if you really wish for it," she said with a calmness that much diminished the value of the privilege.

"If I really wish it?" said the Marquis, "and do you still doubt? Oh! tell me again those words that bring hope and unutterable happiness to"——

"Certainly," interrupted Ida with an outward wave of her hand; "but don't be sentimental about it. My life has been so completely blighted that I care very little what happens to me, provided I hear no more of Lady Oxborough and her puppet son. I have no love to give—you must quite understand that. If you are prepared to be satisfied with an idea"——

"Only give me yourself," said the Marquis, trying hard to disbelieve in the conditions. "Only let me prove by the devotion of my life and every moment of it"——

"Prove what you will, you cannot give life to

what is dead. You must come down to the prosaic, or I must recal my consent, and say 'No,' once for all. Can you be happy without any love at all? You are a strange being if you can; and, if you cannot, I shall make your life miserable."

"I can do anything for your sake."

"Without any return, now or in the future? Think what that means; and then, if you are wise, you will think no more of me."

"If that is being wise, let me be and always remain, a fool. What have I done, that you should recal your consent?"

"I don't, I only advise you. If you are prepared to be satisfied with no return whatsoever, I have nothing more to say. Without hope, reckless of consequences, I gave my consent in a fit of sheer desperation, and I hold myself bound by it, if you persist in your insane offer. I ask you again—are you prepared to be satisfied with no return whatever to all this devotion that you suppose yourself to feel?"

"I am, if you can give none," he said hurriedly and with much effort. "I can hope against hope for your sake."

"Be it so then!" said Ida. "You are responsible for the consequences."

There was a dead silence, which was broken at last by the entrance of the courier carrying a cloak. Lady Dytchley had returned and gone to her room. The Marquis, remembering the pet project, began to move; but he remembered also that time and place are important details in a wedding, whatever its consequences may be, and he suggested rather timidly that they were so.

"I ought to be at home very soon," he said, "for some important business, unfortunately—in less than a fortnight in fact—only that seems impossible."

"I don't care," said Ida impatiently. "Settle it yourself. I have nothing to do with it."

The Marquis, thinking that silence was the safest answer, retired with outward dignity, hoping that the persuasive powers of his devotion would at last soften her. He had not yet learned that Englishwomen, though their eyes are not black, as a rule, can be dangerous when they are *in this humour won*.

He had hardly left the scene of his unenviable success when Lady Dytechley reappeared, looking ruffled and anxious. Her face was red—it was indeed, and her breathing short. The train of her dress jerked its way into the room, and folded itself double when she stood to speak.

"You were right," she said. "He has quite got over it—quite."

"Who has got over what?" said Ida carelessly.

"Why you know where I have been; and I am sure you have complained often enough about his venturing to propose."

"Yes, of course. What of him?"

"Well, I say, that after all the fuss he made, he has quite got over your refusing him."

"I don't see how that can be. There was nothing to get over."

"I don't understand you at all, and haven't for some time. You don't seem to care about anything."

"Naturally. I told you how it would be ; and so it is. But I can't see what there is to care about. If he had anything to get over, and has got over it, so much the better for him."

"Yes, but he needn't have shown it in that way, as if he were doing it on purpose, a before half a dozen chattering people, who do nothing but mind other people's business, and carry it about with all sorts of additions."

"But what did he do?"

"Well, it was Lady Oxborough's fault; and the girls were worse than she was, talking all the time to other people, and making it evident, as if they hardly knew me. And she made herself as disagreeable as she could be, and he kept on flirting with a great forward girl—I don't know who she was—making me look like a fool after it all, when she had been so anxious for it."

"It doesn't signify to me now what she was, nor what he was, is, or may be. His name has been a sound of evil omen to me from the moment I set foot on board the Folkestone steamer; and when all was over with me, and the future utterly void of hope or interest of any kind, I heard it continually mentioned, even up to half an hour ago, in terms of praise that drove me to make sure of not hearing it again."

"You may feel sure of it—indeed, you may. You shall never be worried about him again."

"I know that, but not as you mean."

"Oh! but it *must* be the same, for my only wish about it is what yours must be. Do you know, I have been thinking it all over a great deal, and—and I feel sure there is some mistake

about Everard — something that would put a different construction on his letter.”

“No. There can be no other construction of that last sentence. I remember it, every word, with such dreadful distinctness.”

“Yes, but—you know”——

“Every word is before me, as if written in letters of fire. Listen! He said, ‘*I really do not care, and cannot see the beauty you speak of.*’ I never wanted him to see any beauty, but only to love me as I was. It is impossible to love without preferring the sight of the loved one to any other. No woman worthy of the name can endure having any one else preferred, *even by the eyes.* I could get over the rest—his writing about me in that way to a comparative stranger, or even what he says about the fortune—but not *that*. That is sufficient of itself, and with all the rest—his silence, the indifference he showed after we had left home, when he went to Netherwood and found us gone—of which you have so often reminded me—his never coming or taking any notice of either of my two last letters, his saying nothing when you accused him of not caring for me and warned him that you should consider him as disengaged—you told me so yourself—it all hangs together. I must be madder than misery has made me, if I could delude myself into imagining a shadow of hope. Don’t torture me any more by talking of hopes that have no foundation. All is over now. A few minutes ago I chose, in my despair, the only course you had left me to escape from hearing any more of Lady Oxborough and her son.”

"Good gracious! What have you done?" exclaimed Lady Dytechley, feeling as if she had been pricked all over with red-hot needles.

"I have accepted the Marquis Moncalvo," said Ida, with startling distinctness.

Lady Dytechley bounded a full inch off the ground, and her figure, inflated perhaps by increase of breathing, made no audible impression on it when the attraction of gravity brought her down again.

"O Ida! For shame!" she gasped out, reddening more and more at each exclamation. "So soon, too! and after all you said!"

"You never thought of that," said Ida, "when I implored you to have pity, and not talk at me and work all day long to break off my marriage before you had any cause for it in reason or justice."

"Well, but I have acknowledged I was wrong. What can I say more? I—I can't believe—I really can't—can't. Oh! when you think of it! and you won't care the least for him—you know you won't."

"Of course not. If I could, the history of my life would have been altogether different, and I should be different."

"But why think of *him*?"

"My dear mother! you must mean why did he think of me?"

"No. I don't care what he thought of. I meant, why did you accept him? so very wrong of him."

"You didn't think it wrong of the other, who knew I was engaged."

"No, he didn't; but never mind. I am accused of everything, I know. You *must* see how sly it was of him to show no signs of anything, and then propose all at once, when you were not in a state to know your own mind—and you don't know it now, and you will find it so—you will, indeed, if you go on in that way. Now why did you accept him?"

"Because he had behaved well before, when the model young man"——

"Ida, Ida! Is it right to go on like this?"

"I don't know. Right and wrong have been made to change places so often since the day we dined at Bramscote"——

"Oh! oh! if it's to come to that"——

"And all the curious things that went on when you were upstairs"——

"I won't hear. Oh! you ought to be ashamed."

"I can't help it. I am driven to say these things, and I might say much more. You wanted to know why I accepted him, and I answered that he had behaved well when the model did not. But I had other reasons besides. No one else would be satisfied to marry a woman who tells him, to begin with, that she neither does nor ever can, nor ever will, care about him at all. I told him so. I told him, that if he was satisfied with an idea, he was welcome to it. He persisted, and he shall have it. You can't say anything against him in a worldly point of view?"

"No; but that isn't it. Surely you must see that such a sudden thing"——

"What you wished for would have been as *sudden*, and sooner by six weeks or more."

"There it is again. Haven't I told you again and again that I was wrong? Do you want me to go down on my knees and confess it in a white sheet, like the Roman Catholics? I say that it's abominable. I never could have believed such a thing of you. To go and engage yourself like that, without a particle of affection—oh!"

"It isn't my fault. Do you wish me to marry ever, or not?"

"Why yes, of course. What do you mean?"

"I mean that if you do, you must not complain of the bargain. Love is out of the question."

"Then don't bring misery on yourself by marrying him. Do you suppose he will endure such treatment? He may say so now, because he doesn't believe that you are in earnest; but no man would bear"——

"He *must* bear it. A woman who has lost all hope is more unmanageable than a wild beast, for she has nothing to fear. I was once gentle and loving, as you know. You know how I became what I am. Do you wish me to die?"

"Die. Why *will* you frighten me so?"

"Because I want you to understand what the choice is. My heart must either break or harden. I must either pine to death, or keep myself alive by the excitement of resenting my wrongs, as people live on stimulants; and that is what I am doing. I made no choice: I was carried along by a blind instinct, and I must follow it."

"Now don't talk so wickedly. Do you know you are letting yourself get into a very dreadful state of mind?"

"I know it; but if I were not, it would be in no state at all. My mind would follow my heart, and be nowhere. You would hardly wish that."

"Worse and worse," thought Lady Dytechley. "What *can* I do? Nothing, noth"——.

The word broke in two, with a shock that sickened her like the sudden pitching of a ship into the trough of the sea. Conscience, aroused by danger, spoke out and said :

"Do? Rather undo. Undo your own work. Correct your wilful misstatements. Tell her what you suppressed. The letter would have had no force without your preparations and commentaries and continual perversions of truth, always in the same sense."

"Why did I show it to Ida?" she thought.

"Did I believe that the letter meant what it appeared to mean? I am afraid that perhaps I may have been led to persuade myself so, by leaning too much to what seemed the wiser thing. I am sure I tried to do for the best."

Conscience was not satisfied with this first genuine attempt at self-examination.

"Undo your own work," it said. "You *can*. Tell her what you suppressed, and you will undo it. Tell her why Everard said nothing when you told him that you considered him disengaged—how you refused to hear him, and then made use of his silence for your own purposes, and suppressed all that he *did* say."

"Well, I couldn't help it, I acted for the best, as things were," she tried to think; but the image of Everard, as he stood before her in the library at Netherwood, pleading for the bare justice that

would have made her present position impossible, rose up before her with the vividness of reality and silenced the thought. She was a woman, after all, and the completeness of his heroic manhood, strong, gentle, beautiful in every sense, impressed her as she had never been impressed before. Prejudice had been driven out, and he appeared to her memory as he was.

"This misunderstanding is intolerable," she said. "We must go home at once, and make an end of it."

"There is no misunderstanding," said Ida, "and I will not go home. I will not set foot on English ground till my fate is fixed as *he* made it."

"Till when?"

"Till I am married to the man you put in my way to tempt my recklessness."

"Ida, Ida! is this the way to behave to your mother?"

"It is not; and I never did behave so, as you know. I was always obedient and dutiful and affectionate to you. You have made me what I am. You did everything in your power to make me lose the grace of God by neglect; and now that I have lost it through your efforts, you expect me to act as if I had not. Had I obeyed God, I should now obey you. You have chosen my course for me, marked it out, left me no other. I am following it. I have nothing more to say on the subject, and I can hear nothing more."

"But surely you will come to England first. You can't do such a thing as—you know, really! Do be reasonable."

"I am not reasonable, and I should lose my reason altogether if I tried to be so. I will not go to England first; and it must be as soon as possible. I am quite serious. Please don't say any more about it."

"But, for the sake of appearances, if for nothing else"——

"I really must go, if you say any more," said Ida, walking towards the door.

"You will be talked about so—you will indeed."

"I should have been talked about much more, and justly, if I had broken my faith, as you wished me to do."

"I know that I was wrong about that : everyone is sometimes. Do stay a moment"——

"It is too late," said Ida. "Nothing can change my miserable fate now, or make it more endurable."

She shut the door, and Lady Dytechley remained standing in the middle of the room, as if rooted to the spot by the force of two contrary attractions. Conscience urged her to tell what she had suppressed, pride, under a thin veil of parental dignity, held her back, and shame paralysed her better instincts. There was a short struggle, if alternate yieldings to right and wrong can be dignified by the name, and then procrastination came in with its maxims of caution. Tears, copious and comforting, followed after a while, generalising the difficulty and softening its features, till at length she dried her eyes, remarking to herself in silent thought, "After all, he is a man of position, and he isn't a bigoted Roman Catho-

lic like Everard. I daresay she will get to care for him, after all."

While she was consoling herself with the profound idea that a bad Catholic is safer to deal with than a good one, the object of her equivocal compliment stood before his dressing-case, feeling uncomfortable as to the future of the letters there detained. Ida's two letters to Everard could be posted at Florence too late to be of any avail, and the post would bear the blame; but what was to be done with the seven that she ought to have received, five from Everard and two from Elfrida? What would circumstantial evidence make of half a dozen miscarrying within a fortnight, all addressed to her, and coming to hand after she had been *in this humour won* owing to their suppression? Certainly they must be burnt; but what then? Fire, that purifies gold, could not purify the deed, nor annihilate inferences. Ida would know, some time or other, that those seven letters had been sent. What would she think of their disappearance, in connection with the fact that he was in the habit of fetching and carrying letters for them at that time? A great fear came over him, such as he had never felt before, and a sense of shame, that reproached his will without moving it.

"We must keep ourselves away from her family for some time," he thought. "She will appreciate my devotion after a while, and think no more about past annoyances." Then, going into his sitting-room, he put the seven letters—five from Everard and two from Elfrida, in a scaldino, and holding a lighted candle to each in succession,

stood over them till their ashes were mingled with the smouldering charcoal.

But what was to be done with the four half-sheets of Everard's letter to him? Their fate was still undecided. Should he burn them all, or keep the two that made his case, and consume the other two in the scaldino? He asked himself no questions, but hurried back, brought out the unavailable part of the letter, and applied the lighted candle as before.

"*Causa finita est*," he said with an uneasy smile; "but I have not decided it. The result is against him, but not by an act of my will. Events took the power of choice from me, and they did so when I was longing most for reconciliation with the Church. How can it be wrong to follow that impulse?"

Conscience protested feebly, and suggested in rather euphemistic terms that his good dispositions would be more trustworthy if they had appeared under better auspices; but he said:

"What is done is done!" and went into his bedroom to lock the dressing-case.

There remained in it the two selected half-sheets and the two letters from Ida to Everard. He decided that the arrival of her first letter must be timed accurately, so that Everard could not be in Rome till the day after the wedding. The second must be posted two days later, to make the delay seem accidental. As both would be posted in Florence while he was in Rome, who could suspect manipulation on his part? His confidential servant would go quietly, very quietly, to Florence for the purpose, and return in time

for the wedding. "*E poi*" he began to say in thought ; but a black cloud came across the prospect, and a misgiving that would not be silenced interrupted his pleasant fancies ere he had time to indulge in them. What if Ida should refuse to keep herself away from her family till she had forgotten the wonderful derangement of postal punctuality at Florence ? What if her memory should prove longer than her absence ? A cold perspiration was the answer, and then a voice within said :—

"You will have to live in ceaseless terror, despising yourself, deceiving the object of your unhallowed love, the wife whom you have *in this humour won.*"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN November was within a few days of its close and Lady Dytechley neither came nor wrote, Sir Richard felt, in the words of an old chronicle, *consternatus et tremebundus*, being apprehensive, not of illness or accidents, but of some new and unforeseen plot in which he would find himself playing a supernumerary part against the little will that he possessed. He was quite well now, and had been out hunting twice; but the fear of "sparks flying upward" was upon him, repressing his cheerfulness and feebly exciting a general idea of resistance.

"Upon my word, I'll do something!" he said to himself as he verified the date in an almanac. "The twenty-fourth, and there they are! Not even a letter from her; so that I don't know where to write. I'll do something—I will, indeed!"

It was not the first time that he had confided this cautious resolve to his own keeping; but he went a little further now, emboldened by the conviction that resistance would be the lesser evil, even to himself.

"I won't go on so," he said, taking three letters off the writing-table to put them into the box in

the hall. "I won't have it. I'll do something or other. I won't stand it. I'll be—I mean I won't. I am half sorry that I sent Elfrida to Hazeley to be confirmed there instead of here. Well, it can't be done again, and so there it is; but upon my word—by the by, she'll be back directly. There she is! I hear the carriage coming."

Whilst he was putting the letters into the box, Elfrida arrived.

"Well! here you are," said he. "I have been watching for you. Everard is going off directly. He expects Hubert Freville at Freville Chase to-morrow, and will bring him here to dine and sleep the day after. A good fellow, very, and has a lot in him, very superior for his age—uncommonly. I've got to see a man on business. Here comes Everard. So you are off. Well! mind you come the day after to-morrow. We shall hear soon what day they come back. Good-bye for the present." "Stay," he added, making a half turn when he had gone some distance, "I'll drive with you as far as the village; but I've got to see a man first." He disappeared through a door that led to the justice room.

Elfrida drew back into a corner of the hall, and motioned Everard to come nearer. "How soon must you go?" she said.

"As soon as possible. I ought to be half-way there by this time."

"So kind and thoughtful of you to wait for me. I wanted to see you so much. No letter come?"

"Not one."

"Do try not to feel it so dreadfully. My mother told us, when she wrote last, that we must

not be surprised if we were to be a long time without hearing."

"Yes, but she wrote that more than three weeks ago, the beginning of November. It is impossible that they can have been all that time travelling. They must either have remained at Florence, or gone somewhere else, or stopped at places on the way home. In any case they could have written. If they had been ill, you would have heard from the maid or the courier or some one."

"The letters must have gone wrong. The courier forgot to post them. Ida is certain to have written."

"He may have done so once, but not repeatedly. I have not heard from her for nearly six weeks—five weeks and four days."

"The time is long, and seems longer; but often, when one is at a distance, impediments arise that no one would have dreamt of. For instance, Ida may have written to you three or four days before my mother wrote, and her letter may have gone astray, either through the post or by the carelessness of the person who was to post it, or through some accident that might easily happen. Then my mother may have thought, that, as she had told us not to expect letters at this time, there was no need to be particular about writing since. You can have no idea of the work and bother that travelling entails on ladies, with all the different things they have to wear and get packed, and the small parcels that keep coming in, and the people waiting to be paid, just as you are looking over the hotel bill. Then you arrive

at some place, tired and stupefied, and find neither pens, ink nor paper; and all the next day you are dragged about sight-seeing, till you are off again, and stop somewhere else, and go through the same process. You will find that they have been travelling home in that sort of way, stopping here and there, and being tired and stupefied all the while. It was sure to be so, for my mother always fusses when she is travelling, and tries to do more than she can. Depend upon it, we shall hear to-morrow or next day from Paris, or more likely from Boulogne, and see them a few hours later."

Everard smiled faintly, and said: "You have made out a good case, but the time is too long to have been filled up with the bothers and interruptions of travelling, unless they remained at Florence a week or ten days after your mother wrote last; and if they did, there was plenty of time for writing to say when they would start. Packing and paying bills would take time, but not the whole of every day for a week."

"That depends on circumstances that we don't know."

"We don't indeed, and I must know them; but there is the dogcart at the door."

"And I haven't said half I wanted to say. I shall see you the day after to-morrow, but for so short a time."

"To tell you the truth, I shall come back to stay, if they have not returned or written by that time. Prudence keeps me from going after them myself—you know why—unless I am fairly driven to do so; but Hubert kindly offered to go, and I may have to accept his offer."

"But what do you suppose can"——

"I really don't know. One becomes anxious after so much delay. We had better not talk about it. We shall know more perhaps by the day after to-morrow."

"Yes, but you look so dreadfully ill, so unlike yourself."

"It must be the fog. I am well enough."

"No, you are not. You can't deceive me. I don't like your going to-day. I feel as if"——

"I am ready," said Sir Richard, coming through the distant door and walking across the hall with as much cheerfulness as his legs could represent in opposition to his feelings. "Are your things in the dogcart? I see they are. I hope I haven't kept you waiting."

They drove off, and Elfrida walked slowly upstairs, reviewing what had happened and not happened in the last three, not to say six weeks, and gradually disbelieving the good case that she had made out.

Sir Richard drove with Everard as far as the first turn of the road beyond the village. He spoke very little, but muttered from time to time fragmentary statements of his intention to do something. When the dogcart stopped, he said:

"Keep up, you know. Never say die. I don't mean that exactly; but you know what I mean. I am going to do something, if I don't see them or hear from them in a day or two. I won't stand it any longer. But I want to know where they are."

"I must find that out," said Everard. "Will you stand by me when I have?"

"*That* I will. You may depend on me," said

Sir Richard, jumping out of the dogcart. "Now, keep up your spirits—won't you?"

"Certainly:" answered Everard. "That is all I want."

*Talia voce refert, curisque ingentibus æger
Spem vultu simulat, premit altum corde dolorem.*

Sir Richard walked away, saying to himself:

"I wish I had attended to what Father Merivale said in such a friendly way. It would have been all right long ago if I had; and now I look like a fool, not knowing what to say when people ask me where they are. Why couldn't she, whatever she was about—and I'm sure I can't tell what,—why couldn't she tell me where they *are*? One could do something then. Why couldn't she write?—why couldn't she write?"

The reason was that her will had collapsed before Ida's desperate resolution. She had debated within herself more than once, during that day and many succeeding days, whether she should write to him about it, or wait and see what would turn up; but the latter course always recommended itself to her with the greater force, and always in these words:

"What is the use of worrying him about a thing that can't last? She can't go on with it when she comes to herself; and it would be such a thing to tell in a letter. One couldn't." And then a very prickly heat of an aggravated kind would settle the question, persuading her to wait for something "to turn up." Sir Richard, whose little weak will was under the bracing action of necessity, would have had the best of it then.

He walked about the park till it was quite dark, and then fidgeted about the house, muttering broken sentences. At dinner he scarcely spoke. After dinner he retired to the library, and was seen no more till the next morning.

"One might as well be alone," he said to himself towards the end of the evening. "I couldn't talk to poor Elfrida, with this—I don't know what—hanging over one, and all her mother's fault; and she couldn't talk to me. There's such an awkwardness about it. I must go to bed, though it's only ten o'clock; I can't sit up doing nothing, and I don't understand books, and if I tried to smoke, I should only make myself sick. I owe all this to that red-whiskered fellow, for sticking there on the rumble when he could have prevented the blow-up and all that has come of it. What's this book that Everard left here? 'Gnostic Gems.' I suppose it's about jewellery and that sort of thing—a queer subject for him, but one never knows what these literary fellows will make out of things. I'll have a look at it. What in the world is this? 'Abraxas! compounded of 'ab' (that's Latin) or 'af' (that's gibberish) and 'rak'—why, that's what they call brandy in India or somewhere. I can't make head or tail of it. I must go to bed."

He did so, and quickly fell into a sound sleep, during which he dreamt that he had made everything right by shooting the red-whiskered man into space out of a plaything gun. When he awoke early in the morning, he said, "What a pity that one can't," and went to sleep again, oversleeping himself so much, after the fatigues of the

big resolve, that it was nearly nine o'clock before he was fairly awake.

Everard, who had not slept at all, was then on his way from the chapel to the dining-room at Freville Chase, followed soon afterwards by Father Merivale.

"Thank you for coming," he said. "I wanted to see you. I feel—I can't tell why—as if I should have to go off somewhere."

He had hardly entered the dining-room when his eyes were fixed on one of the three or four letters that were on the breakfast table. He recognised Ida's handwriting even at that distance, and bounding up to the table, tore open the envelope. Scrawled over two pages were these words :

They have told wicked stories about you. Do, do come here at once. My mother wishes you to come, and says she shall believe it if you do not. Of course I know what a wicked falsehood it is, but I am almost glad of anything that will bring you. I have been so very miserable ever since that dreadful day at Netherwood.

The signature was almost illegible, and the letter was not dated. The postmark was "Florence." Everard rung the bell, and holding up the letter, said to Father Merivale :

"You see why I must go. I have barely time to catch the train by galloping all the way to Lyneham. Will you kindly tell Hubert what has happened, and ask him to stay till I come back, and to ride to Netherwood and tell Elfrida where and why I am gone?"

He rushed out of the room, and saying to the old butler, who was coming in, "Thunderbolt to be at the door for me directly. Be in the hall when I come down," ran upstairs to get money. After doing so he wrote on a slip of paper directions about sending his servant on to Florence with his luggage, gave it to the butler as he passed him in the hall, and ran along the courtyard to meet the horse. Meeting Thunderbolt just outside the gatehouse, he jumped on him and started for Lyneham to catch the express train. The distance in a straight line across country was about five miles, and, as far as he could guess, not having a moment to spare for looking at his watch, it would be nearly impossible to reach the station in time; but, on the other hand, neither he nor Thunderbolt were disposed to accept that view of the case, and the ground was not heavy. He trotted round the east side of the house and raced over the grass, till he came to the hill at the back. Trotting up and cantering down the gentle slopes on the other side, he let Thunderbolt go across the flat at his own pace, taking the fences as they came. All went well till he was within half a mile of Lyneham, when he saw in front of him a newly-bound hedge on the top of a bank, with a drop on the other side. He must either take it, or go round and be late. The pace had begun to tell; but Ida was on the other side helpless without him. He made a short aspiration and crammed the horse at it. Thunderbolt pulled himself together, and just cleared the hedge; but the drop was too much for him, and he fell forward *on his knees*. By an extreme effort of strength

Everard saved him from rolling over, and scrambling up, he galloped across the field, taking a low hedge into the road that led up to the station. The last bell was ringing as he turned in at the gate. What was to be done with Thunderbolt? The ostler from the White Hart was coming out, having just brought a horse to go by a later train. "Take care of him," said Everard, making a rush at the door. The door was locked and the guard was blowing his whistle. He ran round, vaulted over an iron railing, and made for the nearest carriage. The train was beginning to move.

"You can't get in, sir, now," said a railway official, planting himself in front of the door.

Everard made no answer, but sent him staggering across the platform and took a header through the window, to the astonishment of an old gentleman who was reading the "Daily Telegraph."

"I beg your pardon," he said. "It was a matter of life and death to me."

"You seem to have had a hard ride," said his travelling companion as soon as he had recovered his breath.

"Yes. I had to race for it across country, and leave my luggage to follow."

"I hope you have not far to go without a great-coat."

"As far as Florence."

At this information his fellow-traveller, who had felt inclined to offer him a big Inverness cape that lay on the seat, began to feel suspicious of bailiffs with writs, and retired within himself.

About half-past twelve Hubert arrived at Fre-

ville Chase. Father Merivale, who had heard the sound of wheels, came out to meet him.

"Everard is on his way to Florence," he said, "and his servant with the luggage has just gone after him. I stayed at home to tell you, and to say from him that he hopes you will wait here till he comes back. He went off this morning at a moment's notice, in consequence of an urgent letter from Miss Dytechley."

"What on earth can"—

"He had no time to explain anything. He only held up the first page of the letter before me, and said that he wished you to wait till he returned, and to tell Miss Elfrida Dytechley why and where he had gone."

"I will ride off there directly: but do you think there is anything wrong?"

"I am afraid—but he had no time to tell me. Lady Dytechley wishes him to go there: but one has no confidence in her."

"What do you advise, then? I am strongly inclined to go after him, and show her, in case of need, that things can be made known unpleasantly."

"I wish you would—I was going so far as to ask you. He looked this morning as if he had not slept for a week, and he started without any breakfast, to race across country, catch the express if he could, and travel to Florence by day and night in this bitter weather without even a great-coat."

"I will stir up Sir Richard, and frighten him into taking action by showing him that it will be

the only safe course even for himself. I'll go at once and catch him at luncheon."

"I shall hope a little and pray hard that you may succeed. I tried to persuade him so myself—a most disagreeable position for a priest to put himself in—and failed utterly. But his eyes must have been opened since then. Besides, he would pay more attention to what you said, as a man of the world."

"I hope so; but I don't see why. You know as much of the world as any one."

"I do know something about it, but he wouldn't think I did."

"I daresay. The less one knows, the less one believes in other people knowing, except when they are in the wrong. I'll ride off at once. Is there a 'Bradshaw' anywhere, to tell when the Folkestone boat goes?"

"In the hall, I think. I will look it out for you. You can hardly be back from Netherwood in time to start before the evening."

"Shall you be at home when I come back?"

"I am afraid not; but I will leave word about the boat."

Hubert went to the stables, found there his own horses, which had arrived the day before, and mounting one of them, cantered off to Netherwood to stir up Sir Richard.

Sir Richard however, if appearances could be relied on, required no stirring. At breakfast he had thrown out dark hints that something would happen if nothing came, and afterwards he gave strict orders, more than once, that some one should ride to the respectable market town of Puddelford

and bring out any letters that might have come by the second post.

Hubert reached Netherwood a little before two o'clock, and finding Elfrida at home, waited for Sir Richard without any effort of patience. Time passed at its own pace, and seemed long because each moment was emphatic. Had the occasion of his visit been any other than what it was, he must have betrayed more than ought yet to be disclosed. An hour went by, and the time appeared to stand still while it lasted. Longing to express what had possession of him, he controlled the inclination without any consciousness of suspense, as if doubts and uncertainties had no place between them."

About three o'clock Sir Richard walked into the room with a letter from Lady Dytechley in his hand.

"Here it is at last!" he said, "and about time it was. Ah! I am glad you have come early. But you had better stop to-night, instead of going back in the dark and cold. I meant to have told Everard so yesterday. Where is he?"

"Between London and Folkestone by this time," said Hubert.

"You don't mean"—

"Yes. He started suddenly, in consequence of a letter he had by this morning's post, and raced across country to catch the express at Lyneham. A servant left with the luggage just before I came."

Sir Richard had already opened the letter, and now began to read it, but had not read much when, contrary to his habits and principles, he

uttered a big word of imprecation several times in a loud voice, applying the same to all whom it might possibly concern and to the Marquis Moncalvo by name.

"Look here!" he said, throwing the letter on the table, and repeating the big words in a lower tone to himself. "Read it. I can't stand any more of it. Did anybody ever hear of such a thing as this? I won't have it. She must be mad, and Ida must be stark-staring mad. I can't make it out. Do try if you can understand it. Read it right out. Never mind *him*."

Elfrida looked at the letter, and turned so pale that Hubert instinctively seized it.

"Yes. Do read it for me," she said. "I don't think I can."

His face was as pale as hers; but he made a strong effort for her sake, and read as follows:

"*'Hotel'*—I can't make out what—*'Rome'*—and the rest. *'I have been so ill and worried about it all'*—and so on. God help us! What is this? *'It was all Everard's fault, for he never came, or wrote or did anything though she begged him so hard to come and told him how dreadfully distressed she was about it and that I was so very very anxious for him to come and make it right, for I hoped of course that the whole thing was a mistake and I hope so now, but I cannot tell how it can be, as he has taken no notice at all, which does look so bad'*"——

"Why he wrote, and wrote, and wrote, and couldn't get any answer," said Sir Richard. "What the—? But go on."

"*'I must say'*—read Hubert—*'though it is so*

dreadful for all of us to think that he could carry off an Italian girl before all the old servants at Freville Chase, who of course would make the best of it and keep it quiet if they could, but who can keep such a scandal secret in an open lane and people coming home from their work?'"

"The Marquis Moncalvo must have set that about," said Elfrieda. "The Italian girl is a middle-aged woman from Chase End, formerly nurse of Everard's half-brother; and the Marquis's confidential servant was carrying her off somewhere because she accused his master of at least contriving the child's death, when Everard, happening to pass by, rescued her. Evidently the Marquis was afraid that the story would get abroad, and so he tried to screen himself by setting this about."

"I saw long ago that he was at mischief, though. I couldn't tell what," said Hubert. "There is something very odd about these letters miscarrying here both ways. It was he who pocketed the letter she sent by half-witted Tim—he said he forgot it.—‘*And then*’ (Lady Dytchley goes on to say)—‘*and then to have no answer from him when she wrote twice and told him how miserable she was! It drove her wild, and no wonder, I am sure, not that I am defending her for accepting the Marquis Moncalvo in a fit of temper, who I must say has behaved very well about it, and I told her it was not a proper state of mind to be in and not a proper way to marry anybody, but she will do it. She was like a mad creature, and actually gave him to understand that she only marries him to spite Everard! How he can be satisfied with*

that I cannot think. I have really been so upset by it all, and hoping from day to day to persuade her out of it, that I was quite unequal to write at first, and then I was so ill in consequence of the anxiety—all alone here with no one to help or advise! that I was laid up in bed for several days, and now can hardly hold a pen. I am afraid you will not be able to do anything, she is so set upon it, so obstinate she is, and so fractious, you would never know her to be the same, but I am doing all I can to get her to put it off a day or two, and indeed I am not fit to appear, I am so dreadfully ill with all this, as you may imagine, so that you may be in time if you come directly, but I have no hopes of your being able to do anything. It is very, very dreadful—and such a thing in the neighbourhood!—and they will all say it was my fault, as if I could have done such a thing!”

“Pish!” muttered Sir Richard. “As if she didn’t go abroad with Lady Oxborough to do as bad! Go on. No! Let me look at it. It *must* be a hoax or a forgery. No, it isn’t—it’s her writing. What’s next?”

“It is a terrible blow, but it might have been worse. His family and position are all that could be wished, his character is quite unexceptionable, and he has a very large fortune. Yesterday he gave her a magnificent diamond tiara”——

“D—n the tiara! I won’t read any more. I’ll be off now as fast as they can pack. I want to have a word with the fellow, if I can catch him.”

“Leave that to me,” said Hubert in a low voice.

“I will not leave it to you,” said Elfrida, a deep

rose-colour mounting into her cheeks and fading away as quickly as it came. "I shall be there as soon as you; for if my father goes, I go, and my father is going. Leave me to tell him what he is. I know enough about him to threaten him with making public that which would ruin him, and I am quite capable of carrying out my threat, if need be. He deserves the worst that you could do, but you shall not do it. You are a Christian by desire, perhaps by baptism, and, I trust, will soon be in the one true Church. You shall not rush into a quarrel that would drag you into danger of mortal sin."

"Well done, Elfrida!" said Sir Richard. "He mustn't get himself into that sort of thing."

Elfrida, who had spoken in simple obedience to a right impulse, was instinctively troubled at hearing her words mentioned in connection with herself. She turned away her head, pretending to look for something on the table, and answered coldly, "The terrible importance of the case must plead my excuse for being so impertinent as to interfere."

"Don't say that," said Hubert with very evident emotion. "I will do as you wish."

"And look here!" said Sir Richard. "Everard is the man to stop it. He has only to show his face: and he will be there before any of us."

"Very little before," said Hubert. "He will lose time by looking for them at Florence. But if you will allow me to advise, I should recommend your taking more time on the road. It would be sheer madness to take—her from here to Rome without stopping, and wouldn't be safe even

for you, after being laid up so long. I shall start this evening, and perhaps I shall be in Rome before Everard. If I am in time, there will be no difficulty at all. I shall only have to tell Miss Dytechley the truth, and the Marquis will have to get out of her way as quickly as he can. But, as she knows very little of me, I think you would do well to write a strong letter to her and entrust me with it."

"Quite right, quite right!" said Sir Richard. "Very kind and thoughtful of you. Then we'll start this evening, and get on as well as we can. But we must see about getting off. We shall have very little time, for there is no nearer station than Lyneham to catch the express at."

Hubert rose to go, and said as he went, "We shall meet there then, and travel together part of the way. May I advise one more thing before I go? I think you had better telegraph to Lady Dytechley from Lyneham, to say that you are coming."

Sir Richard seized a pen and wrote:—

Your letter received this morning—first for several weeks. E. heard from her this morning—not dated, but post-mark Florence, first time for many weeks. He started instantly. The story you mention greatest lie ever invented. H. Fr. off to Rome as fast as possible to expose it, and him too, if necessary, and we follow as quickly as is prudent. She must be mad, and you too.—R. J. D., Neth. —shire, Nov. 25th.

"I think that will do," he said. "Will you get it off?"

Hubert put the paper into his pocket and hurried away. Elfrida went up to her room, rang the bell, and opened wardrobes in hot haste. Sir Richard put money in his purse, and wished that he had begun a little sooner to "do something."

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN Hubert rode away from Netherwood, Everard was paying his unticketed fare to the ticket-collector in London. Having no luggage, he was just able to catch the tidal train and go on without delay, having done which, he began to feel how much he had taken out of himself.

"I have got a very bad chill," he thought; "but I can't stop for anything. I must try what a little brandy will do as soon as I am on board."

He jumped out at Ashford, and bought a Scotch plaid at the bookstall. It gave no warmth at all, and seemed as if it hung apart from him, having no perceptible weight. When he left the train he felt so stiff that he could hardly walk, and a strange kind of dizziness came over him, so that he had some difficulty in stepping on board. A stranger observed him as he staggered across the deck, and after watching his countenance for a minute or two, said—"You are ill. Can I be of any use to you?"

Everard looked at him as through a very thin mist that moved in white waves.

"Thank you," he said. "I will take advantage of your kind offer, and ask you to steer me down

the ladder. I am chilled and exhausted, and I want to see what a little brandy will do for me."

The stranger helped him down the ladder, and said, "A little will not be enough. I am not a doctor, but I have seen a good deal of doctoring and know something about it. I don't wish to be an alarmist; but you must get a reaction, or it will go hard with you."

The steward brought a wineglassful of brandy. "Drink it off," said the stranger. "You will be surprised to find how little effect it has."

Everard drank the fiery liquid, and it tasted like very weak brandy-and-water. He drank a second, and then a third, and they went on deck.

"I feel more life in me now," he said. "I begin to shiver, instead of feeling like a stone, as I did before."

"You really ought to stop at Boulogne and go to bed," said the stranger.

"I know that I ought; but I must go on, and sleep, if I can, in the train. I must eat something at Amiens."

"Have you far to go?"

"To Florence."

"You must have a remarkably fine constitution, or you wouldn't have picked up as you have; but you are running a great risk. I see by the splashes of mud on your clothes that you have been riding hard."

"Yes, I had to ride across country, and jump into the train when it was moving off."

Thought the stranger: "There has been some-

thing more than that to bring such a man into such a condition."

"I wonder who he is?" thought Everard. "I should like to know."

But he never did know. Some one interrupted their conversation, then an unexpected friend called the stranger away, and lastly came the moment of landing, when luggage becomes a fixed idea in the minds of travellers. Everard, having no luggage to think of, looked about for his unknown friend, but only saw the back of his ulster in the distance.

"One receives a great deal of kindness from strangers," he thought. "We are not told in the parable that the man who fell among thieves knew who the good Samaritan was, or ever saw him again."

In the Paris train he found himself travelling in the same carriage with an *abbé*, an infidel *commis voyageur*, and an ill-favoured Englishwoman of a general age, who had a bagful of tracts for the benefit of any Italian dweller in Rome who might be disposed to better his fortunes by being converted to the doctrine of "essentials." The *abbé* was saying his office. The *commis voyageur* raised the point of his snub nose in contempt of all prejudices. The tract-distributor obtruded her chin, and, after a little preliminary conversation with Everard, relative to her wares, informed him that Popery and Infidelity went in parallel lines.

"They do," said Everard, "for they never meet."

"I am afraid we shall not agree," she said, taking up a newspaper. He thought so too, and took out his rosary. The *commis voyageur*

glared at him by way of protest, but, producing no effect, began to pare his nails with a pen-knife.

At the first station the *abbé* got out. The tract-distributor was half asleep, and the *commis voyageur* snoring. Everard tried to sleep, but failed to do so, though he had not slept at all the night before. The shivering had passed away, and been succeeded by a feverish heat and thirst, so that when the train stopped at Amiens, he had no inclination for food.

"But I *must* eat," he said to himself, and drinking a large tumblerful of selzer water with brandy in it, he made a resolute attack on some *galantine de veau*. The selzer water quenched his burning thirst, and the brandy in it enabled him to eat. By a great effort, and the help of more selzer water with brandy, he finished the bit of *galantine*, and went back to the train, feeling that he had been just saved from breaking down.

"If I could only sleep," he thought, "I should do."

He never slept at all during the whole journey, but went on, supported by the fever which increased as he went. When he reached Florence his eyes looked unnaturally large, and he had two red spots on each cheek-bone. It was half-past four o'clock in the morning. He went to the nearest hotel, and with some difficulty effected an entrance.

"I want a warm bath and breakfast," he said.

The porter looked at his tumbled clothes covered with mud, and said that the hotel was full.

"I see what you mean," said Everard, pulling

out his purse. "Have the bill made out first and charge what you like. I must have the bath and the breakfast. Be quick!"

His manner impressed the man, and in half an hour the bath was ready. At six he breakfasted, and then heard Mass at the nearest church.

"I shall be able to get in now," he thought.

It was about seven o'clock when he stopped at the hotel where Ida had written to him. He walked in, and said to a waiter:

"Have the goodness to show me Lady Dytechley's sitting-room, and send her my card by her lady's maid."

"Mylady Deetchlee," answered the waiter, "went to Rome a fortnight ago."

Everard felt a sudden chill at the heart. The fever spots left his cheeks, which became as white and cold as alabaster.

"Impossible!" he said. "I had a letter from them in England four days ago, written from here, and saying that I should find them here."

The waiter shrugged his shoulders and called the padrone, who confirmed the fact.

"Do you know where she is in Rome?" said Everard. "And will you have the goodness to tell me when the next train goes?"

The padrone disappeared through a door, and coming back in a few moments, informed him on both points. Everard took the last card out of his card-case and wrote Lady Dytechley's direction on it.

"My servant will be here to-morrow," he said, "with my luggage. Will you give him this?"

He then left the hotel, jumped into the first public carriage he met, and just caught the train.

In the railway carriage there were four passengers, a Monsignore, an elderly Englishman, a French lady in deep mourning, and a German Jew of sinister aspect, whose particular part in the comico-tragic drama of modern progress was not apparent.

"In self-defence I must talk and keep on talking," thought Everard. "If I allow myself to think between here and Rome, it will go hard with me in one way or another."

He began to talk, first with the Monsignore, then with the French lady, and then with both. The conversation lasted till they had passed several stations. The German Jew gave a divided attention to his newspaper and to what they said, but showed no disposition to talk. The Englishman had a book in his hand, but his attention was fixed on Everard, and he appeared to wait for an opportunity of speaking to him. At last, when subjects of conversation had become few and far between, he took advantage of a pause, and said :

"I must apologise for plunging so abruptly *in medias res*, but I can't find it in my conscience to do otherwise. You ought to be in bed, instead of travelling."

"I certainly feel very ill," said Everard; "but I can't measure what I feel, for I have no recollection of being ill at all since I had the measles or something of the sort when I was a very small child. I thought I could stand anything, and in fact I never felt fatigue before ; but I have caught a bad chill."

"Excuse my question — I am a physician. How did you get the chill?"

"By riding very hard across country to catch an express train 150 miles the other side of London, and travelling ever since without a greatcoat. To make it worse, I started without breakfast, and had no food till one o'clock the next morning, at Amiens, except some brandy on board the steamer. I was so chilled that I had to drink three glasses of it, and then I was not warm. The only effect was to make me shiver instead of feeling stagnant."

The physician took a card from his pocket, and wrote something on it. "I advise you to put up there," he said, "on account of the situation and the quietness. You are in a high fever, and not unlikely to have inflammation of the lungs. You must have medical advice, and if you don't know who to send for, I can tell you. I had better write it on the back of the card. And now, let me advise you to keep as quiet as possible during the remainder of the journey, and sleep, if you can."

Everard thanked him, took the card, and, shutting his eyes, tried to follow the advice as far as possible. Sleep was out of the question, and restlessness grew when he sought rest. The printed name on the card engaged his attention for a few moments. "I have a dim recollection of that name—Dr. Ranston," he thought; "but where and when I can't remember. I ought to tell him my name, he has been so kind. I will, afterwards."

"There has been some predisposing cause for this," thought Dr. Ranston. "His mind is in a fever as well as his body. The chill and the want

of rest could hardly have brought a man so very strong and sound as he is into such a condition ; and besides, there is clearly something on his mind, that no strength of will can master. I must find out who he is, and whether he has any relation or friend in Rome, or, if not, where I must write to. There is some tragedy of real life here."

Everard gradually forgot the card and the kind stranger who had given it. His ideas became confused, and at length he sank into a lethargic state that made time seem to stand still in the centre of a circle. When asked for his ticket, he muttered, "Where are we?" passed his hand over his forehead, and looked round without any apparent intelligence till the train stopped at the platform. Then he came to himself in an instant. Light was in his eye, vigour in his limbs. He sprang out, threaded his way through the crowd, and went in search of Ida.

Moments were precious, but fresh air was a necessity. He went on foot, passing out of sight before any other passengers had left the station. People turned as he met them, for his pace was hurried and unequal. At last he stopped and looked about. "It must be close by," he thought. "There it is, opposite."

He crossed the road, and overheard the words :
"A beautiful English girl who was married this morning to an Italian."

He followed the voice, without distinguishing the speaker or the person spoken to. He saw as through a mist, and heard the words without noticing whether it was a man or a woman who spoke.

"They say she married in consequence of some disappointment," said the speaker. "There are several stories about it. Some say she was engaged, and broke it off out of jealousy. At anyrate, she was married this morning at the Embassy."

"At the Embassy?" said the other voice. "Why I thought that Roman Catholics could never be married in a Protestant church or chapel."

"Yes, but they are not all so bigoted as that," said the first speaker. "They were married at the Embassy, and there is the carriage to take them away."

"They can't go far to-day. What makes them start so late?"

"I don't know, but they say she hates the sight of him."

"A pleasant beginning. I wonder how he likes it by this time. What was her name?"

"Ida Dytechley."

Everard rushed across the courtyard, bounded up the staircase, and seeing a big powerful man in a hat and feathers, planted before a door, asked for Lady Dytechley.

"*Non c'è*," was the short reply.

Everard walked straight to the door, and was about to open it, when he was seized unawares by both shoulders and forced violently back.

This was beyond endurance, and claimed none. A dangerous light came into his eyes, while every muscle rose and tightened. His natural strength became unnaturally greater, and self-control had no cause. He freed himself with a violence that sent the man backwards against the wall, then,

before the latter could recover himself, dragged him by the collar to the staircase, and holding him as in a vice over the edge of the landing, said :

"Will you tell me where she is? or must I send you down the stairs?"

"*Là dentro*," gasped the ill-fated *cacciatore*, who had been shaken like a rat in a terrier's mouth before the question was asked.

The iron grasp relaxed so suddenly that he fell forward, and just saved himself from tumbling downstairs by clinging to the bannisters. Everard opened the outer door and was passing through an ante-room, when Lady Dytchley's courier, seeing an apparent stranger walk in unannounced, barred the passage. He flung him aside without stopping, and walked into the next room.

A smothered cry of agony burst from his lips as he entered, and then he stood quite still, as if turned into stone. Ida was there, dressed as a bride, and the Marquis Moncalvo was with her. No one spoke. The Marquis turned pale: his mouth became compressed: reckless defiance was in his eyes. Everard hardly noticed him, for his own eyes were fixed on Ida's, and hers on his. He read his fate there more than in the bridal dress that she wore, but most in her change of expression when he entered the room. Hard and hopeless till she looked up, it partially melted like an icicle before the sun, softened but not transformed. At last he spoke.

"Ida, is it true?" he said. "Your dress tells me so, but I must hear it from yourself. When I have, I shall trouble you no more."

"It was that letter," she said; and there was

an intensity of reproach in her voice, that revealed the hideous history of the last six weeks.

"A letter—what letter?" he said.

"The letter you wrote to *him*."

The Marquis felt that he must interrupt explanations at all hazards, or resign himself to irremediable disgrace.

"I cannot allow any more of this," he said, crossing the room in a threatening attitude, and pointing haughtily to the half-open door.

"Ida, are you married?" said Everard, taking no notice whatever of the interruption.

The Marquis became desperate, lost his temper, and, making a sudden spring, tried to force him back through the doorway. Everard shook him off without violence, but his brow darkened.

"For the love of God keep away from me," he said.

The Marquis, enraged at being flung aside so easily in the presence of Ida, closed with him in what he fully intended to be a life-and-death struggle. Everard threw him heavily to the ground, pulled him up by the back of his collar, and holding him off at arm's length, said again:

"Ida, are you married?"

There was no answer in words, but her look of hopeless misery revealed more than words could have told. The effect was electric. In an instant the whole truth flashed through his mind and fired the whole strength of his being. At this critical moment the Marquis made so sudden and fierce an effort to free himself, that the button of his collar gave way, and twisting round, he seized his opponent by the throat with both hands.

Everard's countenance changed ominously, but not in consequence of the attack. He saw the expression of terror, love and mute despair on Ida's face, and his fingers closed on the throat of the Marquis with a grip that made life and death hang in the balance of nature and grace. The Marquis became black in the face: his hands began to lose their hold. It was a moment of awful and insidious temptation. The man who, by the blackest treachery, had placed an impassable gulf between him and Ida, was in his grasp. One moment's loss of self-control, one impulse hardly exceeding that of self-defence would have extinguished his power of evil and rescued Ida from the abyss into which a maddening course of deception had led her. Everard was defending himself against an attack aimed at his life by that man: the muscles in action throbbed with an excess of power that in itself was hard to repress, while justice, the deepest love, duty, even religion, clearly sanctioned the anger of which accident had determined the expression. For a moment the end shut out the means from his sight. He was aware of nothing but a blind and irresistible impulse to rescue Ida at any cost. Then a ray of light shot through the veil of passion and divided his will. Nature and grace were brought into collision; and nature possessed his whole being, grace appealed only to his soul. The conflict was indeed short as to time, but so tremendous in itself and in its alternative, that the struggles of a life were compressed into the space of a few seconds. Grace and the habit of listening to it carried him through a temp-

tation than which a greater cannot be conceived. The iron grip relaxed as by the touch of a spring, and, without trusting himself to look again at Ida, he rushed out of the room.

Hurrying through the ante-room, where Lady Dytechley's courier fell back from a post of observation near the keyhole, he ran against the *cacciatore* on the landing. He took a sovereign from his pocket, put it into the man's hand, and said :

"You did your duty well. I am sorry that I hurt you. I would not have done so if I could have helped it."

"I am sure of that, *Eccellenza*," said the good-natured fellow. "What strength! I never found any man who could do with me as you did. But what has happened? You are ill. Can I do anything?"

"You can," said Everard, who had become as pale as a dying man, and was obliged to support himself by the bannisters. "Of your charity help me to the Hotel * * *, and send for a priest. I had rather walk unless I can find an open carriage, for I want air. I can scarcely breathe. Get me into the air."

The *cacciatore* helped him downstairs, and was about to send for a carriage, when the courier ran a short distance after him, and called out :

"The Marquis wants you directly."

The *cacciatore* objected in strong language, and went on.

"*Avete capito?*" said the courier, descending a few steps and screaming at the top of his voice.

"You must go," said Everard. "I shall do

very well now. I feel better. I only want some air. Thank you for your kindness."

He walked out, and after standing a while towards the wind, began to creep along in the direction of the hotel, moving slowly and stopping often. When he had gone rather more than half-way, a carriage passed at a quick pace, and he looked up instinctively. Ida was in it, and the Marquis. He turned away and staggered onwards, finding his way without knowing how. His sight became dim, his memory confused, and when he arrived at the Hotel, his breathing was so hard that he had to lean against the wall for some time before he could speak. At last he said :

"My servant will be here to-morrow with my luggage, if he can find me. Make out my bill now for a week, or more, if you like. If I die before you have done so, you will find money about me. Pay yourselves, and give the rest to the poor. Show me to a bedroom, and have the charity to send for a priest."

The hotel-keeper, who had been drawn to the spot by curiosity mingled with caution, was satisfied, and only asked him, as usual, to give his name.

Everard put his hand to his head, and his eyes wandered, as if he were trying to remember. "How very strange!" he said. "What has happened? And what makes the air so thick and unsteady? It turns round, and there are spots of light in it that dance about and change places. Hubert knows—he can tell you, and *Elfrida* knows. I know nothing about him, but I

have his card somewhere. He told me something about a doctor, I think; but I am very well now, if I could breathe. I only want to get out of this darkness into the fresh air and light." He tried to walk out, but turned the wrong way. "Where am I?" he said in English—"I saw her just now, didn't I? And then I was somewhere else—in the lane, and Ida was in the carriage instead of—who was it? And—where is she? And there he is himself. Yes, there he is, among the walnut trees, with the note in his hand. Give it to me, or—No! It is too late. For the love of God, keep out of my way. I can't answer for myself. What is this mist before me? How dark it is. I can't see anything at all."

"*Ha la febbre!*" said a waiter, taking his arm to help him upstairs. He followed slowly, stopping at every two or three steps to breathe; but had hardly reached the top when he fell heavily to the ground, and lay there without any sign of life.

CHAPTER XXV.

HUBERT, who had fallen in with Everard's servant and luggage at Folkestone, and brought them on with him, arrived in Rome about noon on the following day, and then, jumping into the first vacant carriage that he saw, drove to the hotel named in Lady Dytchley's letter. He saw a man standing at the entrance, and asked if she was at home.

The man, who was an English servant, called Lady Dytchley's courier, who came forth by degrees, thinking that he saw in Hubert some kind of likeness to the dangerous visitor who had come like a whirlwind and gone like a ghost. "My lady is ill," he said, "and cannot see anybody."

"Well, then, Miss Dytchley," said Hubert.

"They have left Rome," said the courier in a deprecating voice.

"They? you scoundrel, don't play the fool with me."

"Sir, I am telling the truth. What motive should I have? She was married yesterday to the Marquis Moncalvo."

"I must see Lady Dytchley," said Hubert, making a greater effort to control himself than he *had ever attempted before*.

"She cannot see any one. She gave strict orders that"—

"Thief and liar! show me upstairs, and tell her that I, Hubert Freville, am here, or it will be worse for you. I am not going to be played with."

The courier shrugged his shoulders and led the way upstairs.

In a few minutes Lady Dytchley appeared. Her self-confidence had melted away, for the first real trial had shown that she had nothing in herself to confide in. She looked frightened and perplexed, unwilling either to see or not to see him.

"Have you seen Everard?" said Hubert.

"It was so dreadful!" she answered. "He came too late. Oh! I shall never get over it all. You can't think"—

"He heard nothing from or of you for three weeks or more," said Hubert, "and then had a letter from Miss Dytchley telling him to go to Florence. He set off at once, without breakfast or luggage, or a greatcoat, and rode across country to catch the express at Lyneham. He must be in Rome now, if he is alive after all that."

"Florence? Why the letter from there was written long ago."

"So I see; but he only got it then. I came to Freville Chase four hours after he had gone. I rode to Netherwood and saw Sir Richard. He got your letter while I was there, and telegraphed to you, saying that the story about Everard was 'the greatest lie ever invented'—those were his

words—that no letter had been received from you for several weeks, and that he was going to start for Rome.”

“I never got that telegram,” said Lady Dytchley, ringing the bell.

The courier came.

“I ought to have had a telegram from Netherwood four days ago,” she said.

“Yes, Mylady,” said he. “The Marquis Moncalvo took it to you.”

“Oh yes—that will do,” she said, turning pale.

Hubert muttered some strong words, and his countenance became as dark as night. The courier glided out of the room, imagining many things.

“I must go,” said Hubert. “Sir Richard will be here in two or three days.”

“And where is Elfrida? She has such good sense. Is she with him?”

“Yes. Does anyone know where Everard went?”

“No. Unfortunately I was not in the room, and he was gone before I heard that he had come. There was such a dreadful scene, and ”——

“Good-bye,” said Hubert, who had heard enough and too much.

“Won’t you stay a moment?” she said. “I want to tell you how it all happened. There never was anything so dreadful.”

But Hubert was already in the ante-room trying to find out from or through the courier what had become of Everard. No one knew. The courier had a distinct recollection of making way for him without interior consent, and a chambermaid had

heard him mention the name of his hotel to the *cacciatore*, but could not remember which.

"He seemed hardly able to walk," she added with some hesitation. "Something must have happened."

"What happened?" said Hubert to the courier. "I *must* know—I *mean* to know—I *will* know!"

"Well sir, he came and rushed past me through the ante-room like a hurricane, and presently I heard their voices inside. Then the Marquis flew at him and tried to choke him, but he was thrown down. Then the strange gentleman dragged him up, and held him off at arm's length, but the Marquis got free and tried to choke him again. I saw all that, for the door was half open. Then the strange gentleman seized the Marquis and held him so tightly that he was black in the face. I thought that he would have killed him then—he looked so stern—but he let him go suddenly, and passed through the ante-room like a ghost. It was all said and done in the twinkling of an eye. No one here knows where he went."

Hubert thanked him, and waited till Everard's servant arrived with the luggage. Then he went out with him, saying:

"We must go to every hotel in the place, unless you know where he is likely to put up."

"He must be somewhere in Rome," said a waiter, "for he looked so very ill when he went from here. No one could travel alone in that state."

A stranger passing by had overheard these words. He looked at Hubert attentively, and said:

"You are inquiring for some one—a relation perhaps. I may be able to help you."

"Do, for God's sake," said Hubert, "I am looking for Everard Freville, who came to Rome yesterday, called here, and went—I don't know where. I am afraid that he is very ill."

"The man I mean was singularly handsome, and about five and twenty, with hair and complexion like an old Venetian picture—I mean that his face was fair and clear, his hair (beard and all) dark, tinged with gold. He had a remarkably intellectual head, an athletic frame. He had ridden hard across country to catch an express train. Does that describe him?"

"Exactly!"——

"Well, I travelled with him yesterday from Florence, and I know where he is, for I recommended the hotel myself. If you will allow me, I will go with you. I was on my way there in fact."

"Thank you a thousand times. Who have I to thank?"

"Nobody. My name is Doctor Ranston; but I have done nothing more than the commonest good feeling would suggest."

"Most people would have declined the suggestion though," said Hubert. "Let us be off."

"He made a remarkable impression on me," answered the doctor as they drove away. "That was why I was able to describe what he was like. First of all, I saw that he was rather seriously ill and in danger of being much worse. That made me observe him more accurately, and I couldn't help feeling an extraordinary interest in him. I

told him that he must have medical advice without delay, and told him who to send for ; but I felt so anxious about him that I determined to call as soon as I could, and see how he was going on. It is fortunate I met you, or I should not have known who to ask for."

"What was the matter with him ?" said Hubert.

"I couldn't examine him there," said Doctor Ranston, "and he went off from the station in such a hurry that I had no chance of doing anything for him ; but I am afraid he had inflammation of the lungs."

"Then his going off like that must have been very bad for him ?"

"It was. I hope he went straight to the hotel and to bed."

Hubert leant out of the window and said, "Drive as fast as you can and I will pay you twenty lire—forty, if you like."

The coachman liked the idea of the latter sum so much that he did his best to win it, regardless of foot-passengers and police. When he pulled up at the hotel, people stopped and looked in. Hubert jumped out and ran through the midst of them. The doctor followed, and presently heard him say :

"I don't care. I know he is here. He came without luggage, and very likely forgot to give his name. Show me to where there is a man with no name and no luggage."

The waiter hesitated and began to shuffle with his feet.

"I see how it is:" said the doctor. "He was ill, and you were afraid that he had some infectious disorder. Where did you send him ?"

"Really sir," said the waiter, "I know nothing about it."

"Look here!" said Hubert. "Tell me where he is, whether you know or not. I am not going to be trifled with."

"Wait a moment," said Doctor Ranston. "Let me see the padrone."

The padrone was called, and the doctor said to him: "I recommended a gentleman to come here yesterday: his luggage has just arrived. He was ill, and probably you thought that he had some infectious disorder; but he had not. I want to know where you recommended him to go. You know my name—Doctor Ranston."

"Oh yes—certainly, sir," said the padrone. "If we had only known—but the gentleman did not mention you: in fact he could not. He is at No.—Via—. He had a terrible fever and was delirious. He could not even tell me his name when I asked him. If I had allowed him to remain in the hotel, all my customers would have gone away; so I sent for a carriage and had him taken to a house where he would meet with every care. In fact, he could not be in a better" —

"Yes, yes; that will do," said Hubert, turning on his heel and repeating the address aloud.

"This is a bad business, I fear," thought Dr. Ranston, following him in haste.

They went to the place and were met by a fat man in spectacles, who looked confused when Everard's appearance was described.

"Come now. I know he is here," said Hubert. "Show me where he is."

"He was sent here from the hotel ——" inter-

rupted the doctor. "We have just come from there, and the padrone told me that he had sent him on to you."

At these words the fat man looked still more uncomfortable, began to make defensive apologies, and led the way upstairs, explaining as he went. Divested of ornament, the truth was that he had received Everard as coming from the hotel, but finding him without luggage or ascertainable name, had expended the smallest possible amount of money's worth on him. His excuses increased with the height of the stairs.

"Where have you been and put him, you rascal?" said John the servant, who had followed them. "If we was at Freville Chase, I'd take and put you in the fish-pond. Hadn't you the sense to see who you'd got, you vagabond!"

The philippic was not quite intelligible, being delivered in British vernacular, but its general purport was clear.

"I had so much to do," said the fat man to Hubert, "that I could not attend to him myself; and they have made some mistake."

"Did you send for a doctor?" said Hubert.

"I hope they did; but my time was so occupied"——

"Get on, can't you?" said the servant in English, giving him a strong shove in illustration.

The fat man protested against the symbolical act, and tried to neutralise its importance by an equally strong imprecation; but he took the hint, and proceeding as fast as he could, brought them at last to a door, which he opened with as much dignity as the occasion would allow.

Hubert pushed by him into the room, and exclaimed in a smothered tone of anguish, "Good God! he is dying. Doctor, can you save him?—Is he alive?"

Everard was lying on the bed in his muddy clothes. His face was the colour of death, his eyes were closed, and his breathing was not perceptible.

"He is alive," said Dr. Ranston, after examining him carefully. "There is a slight warmth about the heart."

"But his hands and forehead are as cold as stone," said Hubert, "and I can't find any pulse. What has become of the fever and inflammation of the lungs?"

"That will come back, if we can restore consciousness."

"And what is it that is wrong in him now?"

"The heart. He must be put into a warm bath at once, and we must move him into a better room. It is bitterly cold here."

"Be quick," said Hubert, turning to the fat man, who was waiting outside. "Get a better room ready—a whole suite, several rooms."

"And mind the bed is aired," said the servant in English. "Haven't you no maids about, to get things ready? Be off. Don't you hear Mr. Freville?"

"If he dies here," said Dr. Ranston, "it will be through your culpable neglect, and I shall take care to let it be known."

The threat proved to be needless, for the appearance of the servant and the luggage had un-

done the original impression, and orders had been given in accordance with the change ; but it stimulated the fat man's activity and made him give additional orders with dramatic emphasis.

"Never mind all that !" said Hubert. "Get a hot bath as quickly as possible !"

"In his room," added Dr. Ranston. "We must get him down there at once."

Hubert and the servant lifted Everard up and carried him downstairs. There was no life in his limbs, no apparent pulsation. The doctor tore a leaf from his pocket-book, wrote on it, and said to Hubert : "Some one must take this to a chemist's and bring the things back. Stay, you had better go, or there may be some mistake. Make them be quick about it."

Hubert did so, and returned quickly.

After a long while Everard showed some signs of partial consciousness. His eyes opened, and he appeared to see, but without recognising anyone. His breathing became audible and laboured.

"I will send for my luggage and put up here," said Dr. Ranston, "for I can't leave him ; but I must get some medical man to be with him at night. He must not be left for a moment without a medical eye on him, and I must get two sisters of charity. But I can't leave here. I had better write a note and send it by the servant."

When the note had been written and sent, Dr. Ranston examined him again very carefully and remained silent for a long time, watching him with fixed attention. At last he said to himself half aloud, "There must have been some great shock to have produced this."

"There has," muttered Hubert between his compressed lips. "Where is a pen and ink? I must send a telegram—two telegrams."

They brought writing materials, and he sent these two messages:—

"Too late. Marriage taken place. E. dangerously ill. A few hours will show how it turns. Do not hurry."

This was for Sir Richard, in Paris. To Father Merivale he telegraphed:

"I was too late. Everything gone wrong. E. very dangerously ill. Will write particulars by this post."

Two sisters of charity arrived in the course of an hour, and the doctor came soon after ten o'clock. He remained there till the morning, when Dr. Ranston relieved him till the next night. Hubert never left the room, but watched beside Everard day and night.

On the fourth day Dr. Ranston said with evident emotion, "I see he is a Catholic, by his scapular. You had better send for a 'priest. The inflammation of the lungs has been very much got under, but exhaustion has come on, and the pulses are giving way. He will probably be sensible for a while before"—

Hubert started up, rang the bell, and looked at him without speaking. Dr. Ranston understood his meaning, and said, "I am grieved more than I can express to be obliged to tell you that I can give no hope."

"How long . . . do you think?"

"I can't tell; but you had better send for the priest."

Just then Everard's eyes began to show signs of recognition, and he uttered an inarticulate sound faintly. Dr. Ranston raised his head, and gave him some brandy in a teaspoon several times. "Thank you," he said at last. "I must ask you to do one thing more, and that is to send for a priest."

"We have," said Dr. Ranston.

"How wonderfully kind of you to take all this trouble for a stranger, when you are, as I heard you say, travelling for recreation, after hard work. And Hubert, too. How long have you been here?"

"Four days."

"And I?"

"Five."

"Then you must have come on purpose, and travelled without stopping."

"Of course I did."

Everard pointed feebly, and with effort, to a jewelled crucifix that hung by a gold chain round his neck, and said:—

"Keep this—it was my father's—and wear it for my sake. You will continue to do so for the sake of what is in it. There is a piece of the True Cross inside. The recollection of that brought me to myself when my fingers were on his throat—you know who I mean—and I had nearly lost all self-control. Wear it for my sake. You will have the faith soon, I know—I am sure you will, and then you will value it for its own. Please, take it from me—I am not able myself."

"Don't ask me to do that," said Hubert, in a tone of smothered anguish. "I can't take it off you—I really can't."

"I entreat you," answered Everard. "It is one of my last requests."

Hubert obeyed in silence, and held it reverently in his hand.

"Put it on," said Everard. "But no. Put it into my hand, and keep it there till I am dead, and then wear it. Now, there are three things I want to say. Telegraph to Father Merivale that I am dying. Have me taken to Freville Chase. Ask Father Merivale all that you were going to ask me, and put yourself under his direction about it. See Ida, and tell her from me—but mind that you control yourself if you happen to see *him*—tell her from me that—that I—understand it all, that I don't blame her—mind you express that well, for I am too weak to say all I mean. Implore her not to neglect the faith she was baptized in. Tell her it was my last request. Do that for me as soon as you can. But you must express yourself carefully as regards me, remembering that I have no right now, except as a soul speaking to another soul—you understand me. Use your discretion whether to mention me or not, or how; but say what I have said in the best way you can. One thing more about—her—a thing hard to utter even now, when life is passing away. Remember that she is now—I mean all is changed—it was not her fault—but she has other—why can't I say it?—other duties that"——

The struggle was too great for him. His words became inarticulate, and his eyes lost their light.

A spoonful of brandy was applied to his lips, but he seemed unable to swallow.

"If I were to raise him a little," said Hubert.

"No," said Dr. Ranston. "You must not move him at all. It would probably be fatal. If there were nothing wrong but the lungs, I could have pulled him through. It is the heart. Nothing can be done."

Soon afterwards the priest came in. Everard was alive, but his eyes were closed, and experience only could show that he still lived. The priest looked at him attentively, and then at Hubert.

"I am just in time to anoint him," he said.

"He was insensible when I found him here," said Hubert, "and has been more or less so till a short time ago, when he became conscious and asked for a priest; but I had already sent for you. He spoke a little, and then became worse than before. He is the best man I have ever known, and his death will be to me a loss that no one but myself can realise. Is there no hope? They say that priests know more about these things than doctors. Can you give me any hope—ever so little?"

"I grieve to say that I cannot," answered the priest. "I fear that no human power could save him."

Hubert said no more, but he wrote out the telegram for Father Merivale, and sent it off.

"Do you wish me to leave the room?" said Dr. Ranston.

"If you wish to do so: not otherwise," answered the priest.

"Then I will stay," said the doctor emphatically; and he did so. He watched every action

of the priest, following the words as well as he could, and sometimes leaning over towards the book. The priest, after having given the last blessing, went away, saying, as he left the room, "Send for me if he recovers consciousness."

Hubert thanked him by a pressure of the hand, but could not speak. Dr. Ranston neither spoke nor heard: he was absorbed in the recollection of what he had witnessed. The shutting of the door recalled him to himself, and he said in a dreamy way:

"How beautiful it was—all of it—words, action, symbolism, and that wonderful expression of countenance, that out-look of the soul, though the eyes were closed! All is thought of in that short service. There is a whole treatise contained in those words, *Quidquid per visum deliquisti*, and those others, *Quidquid per gressum deliquisti*, go still deeper. How much depends on the occasions of good and evil that we literally walk into, by our own consent or by not avoiding them! But what is it that has given me such a strange indefinable impression, which cannot be accounted for merely by what I have seen and heard?"

"I don't know," said Hubert. "I can only think of what I am losing—no one knows what it is. Pray for me, if you know how. I can't bear it. And you—good sisters of charity, pray for me—I am not able to pray."

His face was partly turned away from them, but he felt the light of their pure eyes on him and looked round.

"We will," answered one of the two, "now and at the Holy Mass. I know what true mourning is, for I knelt by the deathbed of my dear mother

not many days ago ; but we have the same consolation, the only one—I mean the consolation of witnessing a saintly death. Look at his countenance. That expression is not to be mistaken.”

“ I know it,” said Hubert, “ and I know that he is all he looks. It is almost selfish in me to wish that he should live, knowing all that I know. He has borne trials too great for endurance, and they have killed him. But his death will be such a loss to so many people, that its consequences can hardly be measured. As regards myself, they certainly cannot. No man can ever be to me what he has been ; and I am losing him just when he was shaping my life for all time. I never realised before what death is—what it can do. The deprivation is appalling. He had nearly brought me into the Catholic Church, and I longed for it, hoped for it, looked forward to it, saw my way towards it. And now all is confusion, doubt, and darkness. The light came through him and leaves with him.”

“ No—it will not leave with him,” said the sister of charity. “ He will help you still. Be sure of that. He will help you more than ever. The prayers of the holy dead are stronger than the arguments they used when living. Follow his direction, imitate his example, and you will find the only true peace. Pray for guidance. Ask Almighty God to give you the true light, and He will give it.”

“ Will He ? My prayers are so weak and unformed. Tell me how to pray.”

“ Never mind how. Praying means raising the soul to God. He will know your intention, how-

ever imperfectly you may express it. There is no need of words : only make an intention to follow the light that He will give you."

"I will, when I can ; but now I can only pray that his life may be spared. I have no power to fix my mind on anything else."

"It is very natural that you cannot do more at present. Pray then for that, and do not trouble yourself about words. Fix your mind on God, and commit your burden to Him."

Hubert knelt down by the bedside and prayed with all his might, while the doctor stood by, watching Everard intently and feeling his pulse from time to time. Nearly an hour passed without any perceptible measure of advance, for there were no words to mark it, no changes of thought, no intervals. Each moment, as it came into being, was filled by the expansion of an inaudible monotone, the outpouring of an intense desire that Everard's life might be spared. He was aroused at length by a half-repressed utterance from the doctor, and sprang to his feet, mutely questioning the cause, which was not apparent but implicitly alarming. The doctor made no sign ; his attention was riveted on Everard. Hubert tried to extract an answer from the expression of his face, and failing to do so, laid a feverish hand on his shoulder. Dr. Ranston looked round and said :

"He will live—for a time. His pulse is returning."

"Then why shouldn't he recover, with great care?"

"He may ; but I am afraid he will not—I mean *permanently*. You had better go to bed now,

and take some rest. He will probably sleep a long while, perhaps four-and-twenty hours. You shall be told when he wakes. Don't be afraid of leaving him. There is no immediate danger now. You haven't been in bed for nearly ten days, and you will break down if you go on much longer."

Hubert went to his room, fell asleep as soon as his head had touched the pillow, and slept for several hours. On his return he found Everard apparently in the same state as before.

"He has been sleeping all the time," said Dr. Ranston; "and the longer he sleeps the better. There is a decided improvement in the pulse."

"Then why can't he recover quite? Is it impossible?"

"Well—he has so far recovered, contrary to my expectation; and it is just possible, if he could be free from worry and painful emotion of every kind, that, with very great care, his magnificent constitution might keep him going for a long time. But I should be only deceiving you if I were to give any hope of his recovering permanently."

"What do you expect?" said Hubert, with forced calmness.

"It depends on circumstances that I don't know. If he were not troubled in any way, the soundness of his constitution might, as I have said, do wonders. It would perhaps be just possible for him, in that case, to be kept alive, with very great care, for several years. You know how far this can be, and I don't. But any shock, any over-exertion, any worry, even strong emotion, would bring on severe fainting fits—you have seen what they are—and the end would be

paralysis of the heart. I am grieved beyond measure to be obliged to tell you this; but it would be wrong and cruel of me to raise false hopes."

"It would—you are right," said Hubert in a hoarse voice; and then he was silent, remaining in the same position, with his eyes fixed, as if stunned by the blow that Dr. Ranston's last words had given him. After a while, he said: "Could you have saved his life, if we had found him sooner?"

"No," said the doctor; "the mischief had been done. I know nothing of his history, and I have no right to know; but it is evident to me that some tremendous act of self-repression, at a time when the system was already weakened by suffering and exposure, has done this."

"It has!" muttered Hubert between his teeth. "But how could you know that?"

"I can read it in his face. A doctor is often liable to make grave mistakes if he considers nothing but the bodies of his patients. I studied him all the way from Florence, and read his character then as in a book. I see it now, more clearly than before, in the cost of some great victory over himself. Some great struggle has, as it were, marked out two distinct parts of his harmonious completeness—feeling and will. The shock that separated the two for a time has left its traces, and you can measure the force of each by the result. It has been a battle of giants. What enormous strength of feeling there is expressed in the curves of the mouth—you can *neither* describe nor mistake them—and in the

depths of the eyes, even now, though they are only half open. And look at the straight lines of the brows that throw, as it were, the shadow of a great calm across the light where the final struggle fixed them."

"Yes, you speak as if you had known him and his character as well as I do."

"Simply because I have studied human nature. But I want to caution you about being careful when he wakes—he will soon, for his eyes are half open now, as you see. His long sleep of nearly four-and-twenty hours will have been the best thing possible for him; but don't talk to him, and don't let him talk."

"I won't; but the priest told me to send as soon as he was awake. What am I to do about it?"

"Don't send at present. He is not in immediate danger, and yet any exertion or excitement might throw him back dangerously. He is waking up now. I will explain to him what I want."

Everard looked round wearily as if exhaustion had deadened his sense of being awake.

"Why does he seem weaker than before?" said Hubert in a hurried whisper.

"He was sure to feel exhausted," said Dr. Ranston; "but never mind that. I will give him some strong soup and champagne—I got it ready for him to have as soon as he should wake. Keep him quiet, and he will recover to a certain extent for a time—would to God that I could say more!"

"Have you sent for a priest?" said Everard, after making several efforts to speak.

"He has been here, and done everything," said

Dr. Ranston. "He will come again as soon as you are sufficiently restored. You may trust me to send for him instantly if you should be in danger; but you are not in danger now. You must take some nourishment, and then I want you to keep perfectly quiet for a while. Don't talk, and don't think, if you can help it. Try to keep your mind as empty as possible, and your body nourished and quiescent. Don't answer—I see you will do as I wish. Here is what I want you to take. It will strengthen you and help you to sleep again, which is just what I want."

Everard took what was offered, remained in a passive state for a while, and then fell asleep.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TIME showed before many days that Dr. Ranston's judgment had been so far correct. Everard remained in a state of dull quiescence for about eight-and-forty hours and, at the end of that time, began to revive very slowly. Sir Richard was still in Paris, and Lady Dytchley on her way to join him there. Both had sufficient reasons for not wishing to be in Rome, especially the latter. He, on the receipt of Hubert's telegram, had used very strong language at first, and then shrunk by degrees from the sight of what he might have made impossible. She, finding herself pursued in every direction by the consequences of her own work, had left Rome, where Hubert's presence was a complicated embarrassment, and gone to join Sir Richard. She travelled by short stages, resting much and suffering much disturbance within. After being nearly a month on the road, she reached Paris at the end of the first week in January, dejected, perplexed and silent, with a great weight of luggage and a still greater weight of apprehension.

All were silent when the three met. Sir Richard was too much convinced of his own share in the tragedy to say anything about hers, and Elfrida felt her mother's position so deeply, in reference

to it, that she tried to escape notice. After a few general inquiries they separated by tacit consent till dinner-time, after which Lady Dytechley went to bed and Sir Richard went out. They had not left the room many minutes when the door was opened and Hubert walked in. Elfrida's face brightened for a moment, and then the rising colour faded away as quickly as it had come.

"I am on my way to Beynham," he said. "My uncle has been wanting me some time, but I couldn't leave Everard till Dr. Ranston told me that he was out of danger. I have travelled without stopping. Here is a note for you from him. It was written ten days ago. I am afraid you will find it as difficult to read as he did to write. The exertion of writing brought on a long fainting fit."

"Does he have them now?" said Elfrida, clutching the note and beginning to read.

"No, he is better. He has had many dangerous relapses, but he is now comparatively safe for the present. More than once Dr. Ranston despaired of his life, but"——

"For one minute," interrupted Elfrida, gliding away towards the door.

Her voice was repressed rather than unsteady, and she turned her face from him, apparently by accident. She went to her room and began to read the letter again. The contents were as follows :

"My dear Elfrida,—

"If the words of a man who is slowly dying have some weight, as I think they will, you may

believe what I wish to say, but have not the strength to write, about yourself and all that you have so nobly done concerning yourself and others. Hubert has behaved like himself. I cannot say more, for my pen will do very little; but you will understand what that means. Keep him a day or two in Paris, for he must be worn out. If I live to see you again I will tell you what he has done for me; but I have great difficulty in writing, and I have some things to say. He is very near the faith—very near—and only wants a little instruction to show him that the truth corresponds with his own aspirations. I entreat you to keep him in sight: you will have every influence. I would say more, but perhaps it would not be prudent without knowing more. One more request I have to make. It is about —. You must fill up the name for I cannot trust myself to write it. Do not, I implore you, lose sight of her. Say nothing about me if you can help it; but if my death will do anything towards bringing her into the Church, tell her whatever you may think right about me. I have full confidence in your judgment. I would say much about the very remarkable kindness of Doctor Ranston, who, though a stranger to me, has devoted his hardly-earned holiday to me. But I cannot direct my pen further. I shall go home as soon as possible, if it is the will of God. If so”——

The rest of the sentence was quite illegible, but below it were these words in a comparatively firm hand ten days later:

“Hubert is just starting homewards. I am much better. Doctor Ranston tells me that I

shall partly recover for a time. If I continue to mend, I shall soon begin to go homewards gradually. I hope that you will be at Netherwood by that time."

"Yours affectionately,

"Everard Freville."

Elfrida read it with difficulty, for it was hard to decipher, and her eyes were filled with burning tears that would not flow.

"I dare not trust myself to read it again now," she thought, "nor even to look at it, for I cannot do so without remembering too vividly how it all came to pass. I feel as if I might have done something; and yet what could I have done? I would have given my life to save his, and I have done nothing for him, though I owe him everything. God has willed that I should not, perhaps to show me how little I am worth."

She put it in the most secret corner of a dressing-box, but could not put away the words it contained.

"I must go back," she said aloud; and then a passage in the letter impressed itself on her mind with fresh distinctness. It was this:

"You will have every influence. I would say more, but perhaps it would not be prudent without knowing more."

When she re-entered the room her manner was outwardly the same as it had ever been; but there was an inner reserve that Hubert felt without knowing why, and misunderstood to his own disadvantage because he was ignorant of what the letter contained.

"But does the doctor give no hope?" she said.

"Only for a time," answered Hubert. "He told me so again just before I left."

"He must have been chilled to death by that dreadful journey."

"No. He had violent inflammation of the lungs, but he could have got over that. Dr. Ranston told me that he must have had some terrible shock. I know well what it was. He saw her in her bridal dress. He controlled himself when, after being murderously attacked, his fingers were tightening round the throat of the man who had betrayed him and her. He let that man go. He tore himself away from her. That was what he did—an act that has no name, because it includes all that is great and good and beautiful, an act of such high heroism that I cannot realise it in imagination. When I arrived the next day, I found him unconscious and apparently dead. He remained five days in that state, more or less, and relapsed several times afterwards. He is recovering now, partially, but the organ of life is injured, as those prolonged fainting-fits prove but too plainly. Dr. Ranston says that the end is likely to be paralysis of the heart. It may be warded off, he says, by excessive care in those about him, if we keep away from him all excitement or emotion. But how can we do that? I must hope and pray—hope, as it were, against hope, for I am unable to face the alternative. But yet I cannot see what is to be done. If the cause were limited to the past, he might, possibly"—

"He will, if God wills it so," said Elfrida.

"She was not worthy of him—I must say it, though she is my sister."

"You know what she is better than I do," said Hubert; "but I cannot believe that he would have loved her so intensely, if she were not by nature worthy of his love. There has been some frightful treachery; and though I can only guess"—

"I don't care what treachery there was," interrupted Elfrida. "Nothing can excuse her."

"Not altogether, perhaps; but there is more than you have any idea of. That scoundrel must have got hold of his and her letters—I don't know how, but it wouldn't be very difficult to a man who has no scruples in the way. He suppressed Sir Richard's telegram, which would have stopped the marriage. He took it from the courier, and he never gave it to Lady Dytechley. Now as he was capable of doing that once, he was capable of doing it more than once; and, in fact, there is no other way of accounting for several things. How was it that there were no letters from her for so many weeks, and none from Lady Dytechley for nearly as long? And how came it that Everard was sent for by letter to Florence, and when he went there, found them gone? It all fits in too well to be accidental. The person who told or implied the lie about Everard, and suppressed the letters from Florence, and perhaps from Rome, suppressed Everard's letters that would have disproved the lie, and suppressed the telegram that would have stopped the marriage. I know who suppressed the telegram, and knowing that, I know who did the rest—the only person who had *at once* an interest in doing it and the cunning,

and the knowledge and the opportunity. His manipulation of the letter that called Everard to Rome by Florence will give you some idea of his malice. He didn't destroy it, but kept it back just long enough to make him arrive too late and hear that the marriage had taken place five hours before. When one considers the nature of the design, the manner of accomplishing it, and remembers that the victim is Everard, language fails, and anger burns on steadily to a white heat."

It evidently did so in him. The unnatural calmness of his manner, the intensity of his voice, the simple statement of facts, without excess of words, almost without an epithet, were in such powerful contrast with his countenance, that Elfrida became apprehensive of evil consequences. Her face had been turned away from him; but the tone of his voice made her look up at last, and the compression of his lips, the fixity of every feature, the veiled light that, as it were, streamed through his eyelashes while his eyes were lowered to conceal it, only confirmed what she had felt without seeing.

"It can hardly be possible," she said, "for anyone to feel more angry than I feel. I could hate him horribly, do almost anything against him, if I were to give myself the least encouragement. But retribution is not for us. God repays where and when it is due. Remember how Everard controlled himself, and under what circumstances. If he could do that"——

"I do remember it," said Hubert, "and wonder at it, look up at it from below, realise it as his, understand it because I know him and know the

blinding nature of the provocation and the deceptive shortness of the time at his disposal."

"You will stay in Paris a day or two, won't you?" said Elfrida. "Everard wishes it. He says in his letter that you have been sitting up with him so much, and want rest."

"I really don't. I *must* go on. It won't do me any harm, and won't signify if it does. There is a train soon—I must go and find out when it is. They can tell me below." She made no answer: and he, drawing a wrong inference again, went away, disheartened in himself, dissatisfied with himself, taking her last words and her silence as proofs that she had only an indirect interest in him, and feeling ashamed of the thought because it might seem to imply an impossible jealousy of Everard, hateful even to resent.

"There is something bad in me," he thought; "or such an idea would never have come into my head. She feels it—*must* feel it, with such a model as Everard to measure me by."

In this state of mind he went to look at the train bill, and found that the tidal train would not start till the next morning.

"But I can't wait for that," he thought. "I must get away from here, whatever happens. There is an end of everything—everything. Perhaps if that incarnate fiend—who has lost his right to a name because he would disgrace any name—if he had not caused that sublime effort which has raised Everard so high above us all, my own efforts to follow his lead at a distance would have made a man of me in the higher sense, and offered her something less unworthy

to accept. He has been the ruin of Everard's happiness : it is fitting that he should be the ruin of mine. He has blighted all that he has come near, and the blight goes on. His existence, as her husband, is death to Everard, shortening his life by degrees ; and he lives to complete the diabolical sacrifice. I believe that Everard would live yet—I am certain of it—if that brute were not cumbering the earth. In former days there would have been a way out of this—and men were certainly not worse than they are now. He lives but to destroy in every way. How can I make Everard's faith my own, while his betrothed wife is losing hers through his unmerited misfortunes ? How can I realise his hope while she who was his life's hope is without it ? How can I try to imitate his charity while evil prevails over him, triumphs over him, possesses her in spite of him ? All is darkness and disorder and injustice, and it all centres in that beast, grew out of his infernal presence amongst us. Am I to bear this, that I may help to consummate the work ?”

He went out, and standing under the arcade that fronts the Rue de Rivoli, lighted a cigarette, puffing at it till the sparks flew about. He had scarcely done so when he heard a voice that made his blood boil and his face become livid. There were two men standing in the shadow a little way off, or walking slowly on, and one of them was the speaker. The words could not be distinguished, but the voice was the voice of the Marquis Moncalvo. Hubert threw away his cigarette and moved on.

“When am I to have the honour of being pre-

sented to your beautiful wife?" said the other man in French.

The Marquis evidently found the question embarrassing and altogether unpleasant. He looked aside, as if he had not heard it, and then, seeming to wake up from a fit of absence, answered rather abruptly, "She is not in Paris."

"You have left her so soon?"

"I was obliged. I shall go back to-morrow."

"Will she come to Paris this winter?"

"Perhaps."

People walked and talked on every side, but to Hubert those two voices were the only sound, and he followed it, listening for the worst that he might hear.

"I shall go this evening, instead of to-morrow," said the Marquis, with no intention of doing so. "I—I promised that I would return as soon as possible."

He had better not have said that, for his persistent friend found encouragement in it, and after an emphatic *Je le crois bien*, went on to say, "How fortunate you are to have won such a prize."

The Marquis, who had found by experience that its value to him accorded with Ida's limited promise, rather than with his own ill-founded hopes, disliked the remark, and feeling the failure of his success, took refuge in bitter hatred of Everard. He lighted a cigar, as an excuse for not answering, and walked on.

"I heard that he came to claim her," said his friend, "and that you carried her off in spite of him, like a hero of romance."

The Marquis, remembering the circumstances, winced at the compliment, and resenting the truth, gloated over its perversion. He said nothing; but an evil smile of seeming triumph mingled with unsatisfied hate distorted his handsome features, and betrayed a portion of the truth. His friend perceived as much as lay on the surface, and, being a man of low morality, admired what he saw.

"Ah!" he said. "I see that you are not satisfied with having won her affections from him."

The Marquis muttered an awful imprecation between his teeth, and his face turned white, with a shade of leaden blue.

"Come!" said his companion jauntily. "It might satisfy you to have had such a success—such a complete success too; for if he came to claim her"——

"No, I am not satisfied," interrupted the Marquis, casting prudence to the winds in the recklessness of his passion. "I am not satisfied, cannot be satisfied, will not be satisfied while he lives. I tell you that I would sacrifice anything, everything, to measure swords with Everard Freville—give my life to take his."

Hubert, who was close behind, stood still for a moment, verifying the sense of the words, and then, walking quickly past, planted himself in the way.

"You have said enough," he said, in a voice that no one could have recognised as his. "You say that you wish to measure swords with Everard Freville, knowing well that he who held you in a death-grip and spared your life, while the

widowed bride mutely accused you before God and man, would not—even were he now able to do it—stain his pure soul by an act which his religion forbids. I am here, and I mean to take you at your word, in his place, on my own account. I am not going to tell you what you are. You know yourself and your actions as well as I do, and your motives better than I should be able to imagine. But you have murdered my best—my only friend, blighted the heart and soul of his betrothed wife, robbed society of its noblest ornament, bereaved his old and honoured inheritance of its heir, robbed the poor of a protector and a model; and if that is not enough, you may finish the work by killing me, if you can. You will then have cut off the name and race of the man you delight in hating. The last heir of the name and race. Do it if you can; but take care of yourself, for I don't mean to spare you. Choose your weapons. You have the right of choice, I believe, and you seem to like swords, which will give you a great advantage over me. But, either with swords, pistols, or any other weapon that may suit your convenience, we must meet at daybreak to-morrow morning in the Bois de Boulogne, and decide whether you are to finish your work, or I am to rid the world of you."

The Marquis appeared to hesitate, and then assuming a haughty manner, said:

"I have no cause of quarrel with you, and I decline your interference."

"Do you? Then I must compel you to accept it."

"I tell you that I will not. Men of my age

don't fight with boys. I admire your courage, but I am not going to deprive Lord de Freville of his heir. Send or bring some other substitute, and I shall be happy to meet him ; but I will not accept a challenge from you. I have told you why."

He stepped on one side, raising his hat slightly, and began to walk on.

Hubert suddenly placed himself in front, and said :

"It comes to this : Either you will accept it, or I shall be under the necessity of taking you by the collar and kicking you in front of the hotel, for the edification of Lady Dytchley."

The Marquis's face changed from pale to ghastly white, and his lips quivered.

"You have left me no alternative," he said. "The destiny that I have made pursues me to the end. Be it as you will. My friend shall call for you before daybreak, unless you can find some one else. Allow me to introduce him. There is no need of explanation, for he understands English and has heard what you have been pleased to say."

Hubert bowed, and taking off his hat to both, walked slowly back into the hotel.

CHAPTER XXVII.

HUBERT went to his room, and lying down on the bed in his clothes, tried to sleep. Owing to sheer fatigue and want of rest, he fell into a heavy dose, and remained so two or three hours. At last he was aroused by the sound of footsteps passing his door.

He bounded off the bed and looked at his watch, thinking that the Marquis's friend had come. The watch pointed to half-past one, and the sound of footsteps died away in the distance; but another kind of reaction had now set in. The false lustre that emotional reasoning had cast around his intention faded away in the darkness of the small hours, disclosing the character of the act and marking its deformity by contrast. The nature of the act was disclosed in a rapid succession of images. He saw direct murder and indirect suicide vividly pictured before him as the alternatives of the unlawful combat. He saw Everard wrestling with death to utter an almost prophetic warning, and heard his voice, as in a distant echo, saying faintly, "Mind that you control yourself if you happen to meet *him*." And then he saw Elfrida, not as he had seen her a few hours *before*, when he mistook the cause of her reserve,

and went his way despairing of all things, but as he had seen her at Netherwood the last time they met there, as he had seen her in day-dreams till that evening, as he had found her then in reality when he looked without seeing and observed without understanding.

"All is lost," he thought, "lost, whatever happens; and yet I am unable to make out how I could have acted differently. How could I—seeing what I saw, hearing what I heard, feeling what I felt, and forgetting the rest? How? As Everard did, under a temptation incomparably greater, more persuasive, more sudden, pleaded for by the presence of his betrothed wife, whose wrongs cried to Heaven for vengeance and whose fate was in his hands, after his life had been attempted by the man who had betrayed them both. Yet he controlled himself. And what did I do? I sought the quarrel, would have it, though I had just left the presence of"—

He could not pronounce her name even in thought. It met him with the question, "What right have you to think of her by that name?" and he answered, "I have no right, no hope." Then he thought of their last meeting; and at once the whole scene was present, but not as then. A veil had been torn away. Intuition was free again. He saw and understood, but could hardly be said to think; for the truth rushed in like a flood, overwhelming him with its mass of evidence, yet appealing to his heart so convincingly that his mind was for a while inactive while his lips repeated involuntarily what he felt.

"She was the same," he said, "as when I last

saw her at Netherwood, when I had reason to be sure of her. Her reserve this evening proved that I was right. I mistook it like a madman, despaired of everything, did what I have done, and made myself responsible for what I cannot avoid doing in a few hours."

At length he began to think, and the truth seemed worse than when he only received its impression. He had been told by the doctor that Everard must be kept free from all excitement, yet Everard would soon hear that he had either sent a guilty soul to judgment or died with the guilt of murder on his own. He was more than ever convinced that there can be but one true Church, and that only one has the marks of being so, yet he was choosing the imminent risk of being cut off from it for ever. He loved Elfrida with an intensity that strong natures alone can feel or understand, yet he was rejecting her influence, and going from under the very same roof to grieve her as deeply as possible, going forth from where he stood, within a few yards of her; going forth against his conscience, his heart and his natural will, to break the law of God, and, rejecting mercy, claim His justice. The prospect was appalling, for the heroic had vanished, and nothing remained in his sight but sin, ruin and despair.

"Oh my God!" he exclaimed in the bitterness of his soul, "save me from the sinful consequences that I entailed on myself ignorantly and know not how to avoid. I can see no way out of them: but to Omnipotence nothing is impossible. Virgin Mother of the Man-God, who died to save sinners, help me, if you can. Your

prayers must have more weight with Him than those of any other created being. Help me out of this blind fate that makes me doubt all things. Help me out of the sin from which I cannot extricate myself. Help me to the True Faith, whatever it may be, whatever it may cost."

After this he wrote a letter to his uncle, giving a simple statement of the whole affair, so far as it had proceeded, asking his pardon for the loss it might entail on him, and quoting his own prayer to show exactly what he felt.

Then he began a letter to Everard, and wrote till past six o'clock, tearing up sheet after sheet and rewriting the whole several times. He was more dissatisfied with the last attempt than with the first; but the unwound clock that stands on every Parisian chimney-piece warned him to desist and begin a third letter, no less important than the others.

The third letter was addressed to Dr. Ranston. It was necessarily short, but sufficient, and ended with a strongly-worded request to use his discretion about the time and manner of giving the enclosed, meaning the letter to Everard, which he put in the same envelope. He then sealed the three letters and awaited the arrival of the Marquis's friend.

A little before seven he heard footsteps coming towards his door, then other footsteps behind, and then a knock. He opened the door, and a porter gave him a card. He took it without reading the name, and bowing to the figure behind, followed it downstairs. He found a carriage waiting outside, and drove off with his unknown second.

Not a word was spoken. The second looked important, but Hubert never looked at him. Another reaction had begun: another picture was before him. He was thinking of the provocation and sounding its depth. The injustice, the treachery, the immeasurable wrong, stretched out before him in a series of well-remembered scenes, from the beginning to the beginning of the end. In each the Marquis Moncalvo was the one figure that absorbed his attention. He saw the suddenly detected expression of his countenance in Foxhole Wood when he was speaking of Everard and the unsigned marriage settlements. He saw his subdued triumph at Netherwood, when Everard arrived there only to hear that Ida was already on the way to Italy. He saw him at Freville Chase, walking quietly upstairs to evade Everard's inquiries about the lost note. He saw him at Florence and Rome, scheming against Everard; achieving his purpose, escaping retribution, triumphing in complete success.

"But is it complete?" he thought. "No! I could see in his face that she hates him, loathes the sight of him; and am I to leave things as they are, and leave him to scheme against her better instincts and finish the murder of Everard? It were better to spare a tiger roaming at large on a village green."

This was his last word, his final conclusion. He smiled grimly and said to his companion:

"By the by, I hope there is a weapon for me of some sort. I had none of course with me, and *it was too late to get anything last night.*"

The second assured him that there was, and they relapsed into silence.

The day was now beginning to dawn. A cold grey light spread slowly among the trees in the Bois de Boulogne, sharpening their outlines gradually, so that they appeared to grow out of the mist. After going straight on through the wood for some distance, the carriage made several turns and then stopped. The second got out, and Hubert followed him into a secluded place, where he saw the Marquis with two men waiting for him a little way off. He quickened his pace without hurrying, and in a few moments reached the spot, but had hardly done so when he heard footsteps on the grass, and looking back, saw Elfrida close behind, accompanied by two servants, one a lady's maid, the other a footman out of livery. She passed without any sign of recognition, placed herself in front of the Marquis, and looked at him for a few seconds without saying a word. The Marquis took off his hat, and bowed with the grace that breeding and habit had made instinctive; but he would have given much to be in any other part of the world, habitable or not, if he were only beyond the range of those terrible eyes that read him through and told him what they read. He cowered before them, and felt their power so exclusively that he was not even surprised at finding himself humbled to the dust by a girl of eighteen who had not as yet uttered a word. Hubert neither spoke nor moved, scarcely breathed. His second viewed the scene as simply dramatic, and awaited its conclusion in a state of pleasant excitement. The pause was really short,

but seemed interminable to the Marquis Moncalvo. His courage, though unquestionable, was of no use to him now. He stood shaking in his shoes, transfixed, fascinated, cowed.

“So this is your latest impulse of chivalry,” said Elfrida in a voice that vibrated like a church bell. “You sent your servant, under the protection of hired roughs let loose from Ledchester gaol, to capture a poor woman who had been the faithful nurse of your sister’s child, and whose only offence was that she knew your character too well. You schemed with unheard-of treachery to cheat your sister’s stepson out of his betrothed wife, and took advantage of the intimacy you had acquired through him to compass your ends by suppression, silent insinuation and other sleight-of-hand arts that you know better than I can describe them. You suppressed her note to him at Freville Chase: you made his letters to her disappear at Florence: you kept her letter back just long enough to bring him to Rome—to bring him there only in time to see her—when it was too late. In her presence, when she stood before him, dressed as your bride and appealing to him for protection from the unhallowed right you had acquired by violence of deceit, he spared your life in the heat of a life-and-death struggle; and now when he is dying, when his life is slowly ebbing away in consequence of the tremendous effort he made to spare yours, you come here to murder his greatest, his dearest friend, the last heir of the Frevilles, in safety, knowing well your own advantage in the choice of a weapon that you *were familiar with* before he was born. Coward,

liar, murderer, traitor to your own soul, perjured before God and man, false to every moral law divine and human, leave this place and go the way of your wickedness elsewhere, or—by Him who will judge us both when nothing shall be hidden, I swear to you that I will publish your contemptible wickedness to the world.”

The two seconds had approached respectfully, and Hubert's, who knew enough of English to understand the purport of her words, looked round for an explanation. The Marquis felt, as he had felt before but in a very different sense, that he must *Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen.*

“I deserve your anger,” he said, “and am not surprised at the hard words you have spoken. They do honour to you, and I have no wish to deny the wrong that I have done. But I must deny the intention you impute to me. I was carried away by my feelings, having no idea that Everard Freville felt as strongly as he did; and when I came here, compelled to do so by insults that I should not have noticed if they had not been given publicly, I chose the weapon that would enable me to disable my adversary without injuring him. I never meant to do more, and never would.”

“Go then,” said Elfrida, “and may God give you the grace of contrition for the sake of that one better thought!”

“A word more,” said the Marquis, “and you shall be relieved of my presence. You referred to the delay of letters. I respectfully beg to decline being responsible for the postal arrangements in Florence. You have accused me of keeping the

letter back which brought him to Rome too late. How was it possible for me to post a letter in Florence while I was then, and had been for many days previously, in Rome? This circumstance will at least prove to you the injustice of the accusation."

Elfrida gave no answer: she only raised her hand and pointed in the direction from which they had come. He stood for a moment irresolute, feeling the weakness of his plausible defence, and earnestly desiring to strengthen it in her sight.

"Will you allow me to explain?" he said.

"Go!" she answered. "You have perjured yourself enough already."

He took off his hat, and bowing with unaffected reverence, went back with his friends into the road, where a carriage was waiting for him. When they had gone far enough to be out of her way, she followed with the two servants. Hubert looked piteously at her as she passed him, and said:

"Won't you speak to me? Won't you forgive me?"

She turned partly round without looking at him, and answered in a tone of repressed emotion:

"I have nothing to forgive; but you have done all you could to destroy your family, to hasten Everard's death, and lose your own soul just at the time when God had given you the grace of faith. Make amends by asking *Him* to forgive you and promising to accept His grace. The horrible fate you have risked ought to show you the danger of trifling with the grace of God."

"But I really have not trifled with it," said Hubert, following her as she went on. "Do stop a moment and hear me."

She did so, but stood on one side of him, and kept her eyes fixed on the ground. The servants went on in front to find the carriage.

"I really have not trifled with it," he repeated. "I have done exactly what Everard advised."

"So I thought," said Elfrida: "but your rushing into this dreadful affair seemed so unaccountable."

"But you don't know what the provocation was. I went out, feeling utterly cast down and reckless"——

Elfrida turned pale and hurried on. He followed her, saying:

"Forgive me if I have said more than I ought to say here, but hear me for a moment. Don't go away thinking worse of me than I deserve. I went out, hardly knowing what I did, and saw him walking with one of those men. I heard him complimented, admired, pleasantly bantered, for having blighted your sister's life and murdered Everard with lies. I saw his face triumphant, malicious and scornful. I heard him say that he was not yet satisfied—never could be, never would be satisfied while Everard lives, that he would sacrifice anything to measure swords with him—would give his life to take his, Everard's—yes, Everard's. What could a poor fellow be expected to do, hearing that? What would you have done, if you had been me and in my position?"

"I am afraid I should have done as you did; but that doesn't make it any better. Promise that

you will never, never be tempted to do such a thing again."

"I promise you that nothing shall ever make me do so. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes; but do you feel how wrong it would have been?"

"I do, indeed; and yet I can't feel sorry that the thing happened, since it was you who saved me from doing it. You have acted like yourself. I suppose that I mustn't say more about it now, and I don't know how I could put the truth more exactly. But how did you hear of it?"

"The servant went to post a letter, and heard what you said to that man under the Arcade. My maid told me, and so I ordered a carriage to be waiting for me at half-past six. I got in, and we watched you off, and followed you, keeping a little way behind, so that I could come up in time by walking fast. But there is the carriage: I can see it through the trees. Don't come any further."

"No; but mayn't I see you by and by, after breakfast?"

She said nothing, but he felt that her silence was the best answer. She walked on to the carriage and drove back to Paris. He waited a few minutes, then paying the driver of his own carriage, took a circuitous way through the wood, and walked homewards, thinking of Elfrida.

It was half-past nine when he reached the hotel, for he walked slowly, and, being absent in mind, had missed the right turning more than once. He slipped upstairs into his room unobserved, and in half an hour turned out newly

dressed, as if he had been quietly in bed all night. By half-past ten he had breakfasted, and was looking out for a favourable opportunity to see Elfrida. Just then he caught sight of Sir Richard coming downstairs and the servant giving him a letter. Sir Richard went out, the servant went back, and Hubert went forward.

"Is Lady Dytechley to be seen yet?" he said; and his heart beat so that it could be heard.

"No, sir," was the half-expected reply. "Her Ladyship is very tired after the journey, and"—

He heard nothing but the word "No," and presently found himself, he knew not how, standing unannounced before Elfrida, who was writing a note. On seeing him she changed colour and, for the first time in her life, appeared conscious of herself.

"Forgive my coming in this way," he said. "I had intended to wait, and certainly would have chosen a more fitting occasion, but I can find no power in me to bear the suspense any longer. The first time I saw you at Netherwood I felt that my fate would depend on you, and I have felt so more and more ever since. I love you as Everard loved your sister—would that I were like him in any other respect! Such as I am, I have it in me to make you happy if you will give me the right to show what I can be. My future life depends on a word from you. If you can find it in your heart to be my wife, you will not, I think, have cause to repent the choice altogether. If you cannot—God help me! I must bear it, I don't know how. Elfrida!—Can you—will you consent?"

"I can," she said in a voice that would have been inaudible to anyone else. "And I will, if"——

"What 'if' can there be, when you consent? You don't mean that your father"——

"No, I don't mean him. I have no doubt about that. I hardly know how to express what I mean I am so afraid of bringing human motives in where they have no right to enter. Will you promise me not to be swayed by them in taking the step which your conscience is leading you to take?"

"I promise you that I will not let them add a feather's weight."

"Then," said Elfrida, turning very pale, "I may tell you what I hesitated to say, for fear of the influence it might have. I cannot marry you while you are not a Catholic."

"And if I were never to be — should you care?"

"Don't ask me," she said, drawing back. "You would have no right to know anything about me, if it were so. I never thought of that, never thought it possible, never would have believed."

"And you never will have cause to believe it. I have quite made up my mind. I only wanted to feel that you cared about me."

"Then why not ask? I would have told you. I did say as much."

"You did; but I longed for more, and in blundering after it, I have offended you."

"No," said Elfrida in a tone of intense earnestness, while tears welled up in her eyes.

"Not offended. But don't try in that way another time. I can't bear it, indeed I can't."

"I promise you that I never will. It pains me enough to have done it once. But I really did long so much to feel more than sure. Then you *will*, without any ifs?"

"Yes, I will; for my confidence in you tells me that I may speak as my heart dictates. Are you satisfied now?"

"Satisfied? I never knew what the word meant before this moment."

"And yet," said Elfrida, "we shall understand it more perfectly in the perfect oneness of the One True Faith."

"We shall. I know now what I once questioned in ignorance—the impossibility of true happiness in a mixed marriage. People try it, and see no harm, no doubt, in many cases, though how a Catholic can be so blind I am unable to see; but whatever they may think, they are trying to do without Almighty God. I wished at one time to work out the question with Everard, from whom I got my first idea of Catholicity. But now it appears to me too evident to require investigation."

"You make me so very, very happy," said Elfrida; but tears were in her eyes, tears of mingled meaning. "I can't help it," she said. "I was thinking of Everard and the dreadful contrast between his fate and mine."

"And I," said Hubert, "was just contrasting it with my own! and wondering at the inscrutable ways of God. What good have I done? What has Everard not done that could be done in his

short life? Without faith it would be a fearful puzzle to think that his life of marvellous beauty and worth is cut short, wrecked, apparently wasted, and I, who am worth nothing—Elfrida! why can't I deserve you a little?"

"You do—don't be morbid, or you will make me so. Ida was once a pattern to me, for she was better than me. What should I have done, if I had been tried as she has been tried? Yet she had the trial, and failed; whilst I, without any trial, have gained all that she has lost. I could feel as if I had in a way supplanted her. I could, indeed, were I to let my mind dwell on such thoughts. You must help me by example to keep them off. When must you go back?"


"I ought to start in about half an hour; but how can I be expected to do it? I suppose I must be off to-morrow."

A voice was heard outside the door, saying, "I saw him go into their room," and then a waiter brought in a telegram from Beynham. Hubert took it, and read these words:

"Lord de Freville seriously ill, and wishes to see you immediately."

There was no time for delay or hesitation. Scarcely a moment to say good-bye. But then he was sure of Elfrida, self had become objective, and the present was lost in the future.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TEAM by land and sea brought Hubert Freville to Beynham early in the morning of the next day. "What is the matter?" he said, for he saw grave faces and felt a strange hush in the house. Lord de Freville was much worse than he expected to find him. The doctor gave no hopes of his recovery, and he had none himself; but he was not in immediate danger. He expressed a very earnest wish to see Everard, saying that he desired to die in the faith of his forefathers, that Everard had put him in the way of seeing the necessity, and could help him now better than any one else. When told that this was impossible, he could scarcely believe it, and repeated several times his conviction that Everard would somehow or other contrive to show him how. Hubert said that he might indeed, not directly, but indirectly, by the help of Father Merivale, his confessor and greatest friend. Lord de Freville's countenance brightened, and then a shadow passed over it. He was thinking that the old faith would die out in the elder line as soon as it was revived. Hubert assured him that it would not, and explained his own position, his misgivings, his doubts, and his final conviction. Lord de Freville's

face brightened again ; and then another shadow came over it. Hubert again saw what he meant, and told him about Elfrida. The shadow passed away, but he was anxious to know how soon Father Merivale could come. Hubert wrote a pressing letter, and sent a servant with it to Freville Chase by the next train.

Soon afterwards the post brought a letter from Dr. Ranston, telling him that Everard was about to start for England, and would probably be at Freville Chase in a fortnight or three weeks.

"I find him so anxious to be at home," he wrote, "that I think it more prudent not to offer any opposition. I shall of course accompany him home, and stay a day or two, to see how he goes on after the journey, when I shall hope to meet you. I am anxious that you should be with him as much as you can. He is not in a fit state to be safely left alone ; and, if I am not strangely mistaken, there are reasons, whatever they may be, why your presence is particularly advantageous to him."

After reading this he went back to his uncle's room, and finding him inclined to sleep, lay down on a sofa. Tired out by incessant travelling and want of rest, he fell asleep, and slept on until late in the afternoon.

The sun had set more than an hour when he was awakened by the butler, who said that Father Merivale had just come. He jumped up, and opening the door, saw him standing outside.

"I don't know how to thank you enough for this," he said.

"It was my duty to come, if I could," said

Father Merivale, "and I had no difficulty in doing it. I had your letter in time to catch the one o'clock train, and as a priest was staying with me at the time, I could get my work done. You have come straight from Rome, haven't you? How did you leave him?"

"Better," said Hubert. "He is starting to come home gradually. I have just had a letter from Dr. Ranston."

They came into the room, and Hubert, after introducing him, went downstairs to break his long fast, having eaten nothing since the tidal train stopped at Amiens. On his way into the dining-room he was told that a foreign woman wanted to see him.

"Can't she wait a little?" he said. "I have had nothing to eat since yesterday afternoon."

The butler ruled that she must wait, whether she could or not, and bustling off, brought in a cold pheasant. Hubert sat down to it in a sad and meditative mood, wondering at the alternations of joy and sorrow that life had lately shown him.

"It puzzles one's heart," he thought, as he rose from the table. "Elfrida is mine, and Everard—stricken to death. I come home to find my good uncle a Catholic—and see him die. But this foreign woman, what can she want?"

He rang the bell, and said, "I am ready to see her—but where? What is she?"

The butler thought that the justice room would be a proper place, and thither he brought the alien, who entered in a snakelike manner, looking up furtively with eyes that saw without being seen.

"Your very most humble servitor," she said. "This is a most happiest day for me."

"I wish I could say the same," answered he gravely. "But what can I do for you?"

"It is I what will do something for you," said the woman of the middling countenance—for she it was and no one else.

"Thank you: What is it?"

"I know one big secret about you, that should make you to be nobody at all; but give me money that you shall owe to me, and nobody shall know nothing."

"I don't care whether they know nothing or something," said Hubert. "You must have mistaken me for some one else."

"No, no. I do not mistake. Let me speak, and you shall see. You do not know yet what you are."

"I never said that I did. Few people do."

"No, no, no. That is not it. I shall explain myself. You are not the son of him that they called your father. Have you understood?"

"Yes, I hear what you say."

"Listen then. Were you not born in Italy?"

"Yes. What of that?"

"And you was took here by two nurses, an English and an Italian?"

"I believe so."

"Then the Italian am I. Do not you remember me?"

"No."

"Well, you was very leetle; but look and see."

"Small as I was," thought Hubert, "I could hardly forget so unpleasant a face."

"No," he said. "I don't remember you, and (excuse me for doubting your word) I don't believe that I ever saw you."

"Wait a leetle. You believe yourself the son of the brother of this grand lord here, and that he sent you over to England when his wife, your supposed mother, died—but you are not that child at all. The real child took an illness and died on the journey—he died at Alassio, and then we said (I and the other nurse), What shall we ever do? The grand lord will say that it was our fault, that we did not take care of him, and will not believe us, and will make us be put in prison"—

"Nonsense!" ejaculated Hubert.

"We was afraid—I tell it to you I," answered the woman, "and you shall be afraid, but much more. You shall tremble in your boots. You laugh when I tell you that we was afraid, but you shall not laugh when you shall have heard what we did. We saw my cousin at Alassio, and I got from a friend of hers the child of an Italian, and then we brought him home to the grand lord, and made him for to think that it was the son of his brother. You was the child that we took to him. The eyes of the true child were blue, and his hair was white-yellow. Your eyes and your hair are coal-black, like your Italian parents. But the grand lord's brother died in Italy soon after, and never came home (he was very bad when we left it), so we never could be found out. And if he had come, and said, 'Why is he become black?' we had agreed to say that the colour of his hair and eyes had grown dark, as in leetle children

they sometimes do. I know very well that you are not the son of the brother of Lord de Freville."

"Are you aware," said Hubert, "that if this were true, you would be liable to prosecution for conspiracy?"

"Yes, yes—dear sare, and I know that there is no one here but you and I, and that it is your interest not to tell—even more than it is mine. Suppose that you shall say that I told you such and such things? Well! I shall deny it—What should you do then?—eh? eh? But it is your interest not to tell—this I say. It is I that will tell, if you do not pay me money. If I tell, and prove it, as I can do, you will be one beggar like me—you will be nobody. Treat me well, and you shall always be the son of the grand lord."

"But what proofs have you to support this cock and bull story?"

"Proofs? very good proofs. There is one other person"——

"Who is it?"

"I not tell till I choose. I keeps it always hanging over your head. You give me money—or that person shall swear that I tell the truth"——

"And be prosecuted, both of you, for conspiracy."

"I do not care. I am a miserable what has no other hope; and if you do not give me money, I reveal all. Then you will be the child of nobody. How does it appear to you? No name, no money—oh! I am a good woman, very just. I have gone to Freville Chase, to him what is the *true heir*, because I am just. But I am poor, I

tell him so, and it is just that my service be paid. What do you think that he said, that beastly bigot? He ask me when I go to the black priest to confess myself! Figure to yourself the rage! You what are a good Protestant"——

"The devil I am!" muttered Hubert.

"You what hate the Pope and the priest, what you think of that?"

"Go on," said Hubert. "I take it he didn't give you any money, did he?"

"Money? No! I went away for my affairs, and you shall keep it all. But I am a miserable—without bread."

"How was it then that you came here in a fly?"

"That was the last money. I sell my watch last week. I hate that Jesuit at Freville Chase—Sare Freville; and you must hate him, for he is the heir what would rob you of your name, your gold, your big park. Now give me only twenty pounds for to eat, and you shall be safe. But I hope that you will be grateful to a poor woman what has nothing, and give her a leetle pension for serving you so much."

"In other words, an unlimited draw under pain of discovery," thought Hubert. "I wonder what the dodge is. There is some dirty trick, and I must get to the bottom of it. I see I must dissemble a bit."

He made a small gesture of constructive assent, and said:

"So he asked you when you had last been to confession, did he?"

"Oh! that clerical beast! Do not speak of him never no more. I would not help him now—

no, not if he offer me ten thousand pounds. But he think that I did deceive him, and it is he what is deceived, ha, ha! That make me laugh."

"Did you tell him all you have told me?"

"No, no. I only tell him that he should have much gold. That was enough for him, and also too much."

"So he didn't give you any money to help you on?" said Hubert, affecting surprise.

"Not one penny for to buy a bread, I swear it to you. He mock my misery, the hypocrite, and tell me to go to the great fat priest—I what am good Protestant like you. He has not heart no more than a stone; and he hate you, I swear it. If he have what is yours, he will not give you a bread, though you beg on your knees. Come now! Do not you hate him?"

Hubert nodded in an absent manner, as if acknowledging the fact cautiously to himself.

"There! I knowed it well," said she.

"Why, of course, one must"——

"Yes, it is a just rage. I have to it so much sympathy."

"To be sure. It is quite natural. We are sailing in the same boat, as they say, you and I. Now I will tell you how we can arrange matters in a way that will be satisfactory to us both. You see, business is business; and, however much I may believe your word, it would not be right to proceed further without the evidence of the other witness. You will not risk anything by it; for you hold the security of all my prospects, and if I were to play false, you would have your revenge, and get as much money as you like, by merely

going to Freville Chase and telling him what you have told me."

"No : it shall not be ever."

"Does she live in this country ?" said Hubert, making a random shot and looking as if he knew more than she supposed.

The woman of the middling countenance was startled, and after a short consultation with herself, was of opinion that she had better make a merit of telling what, after all, would be no use to him.

"I shall tell it to you," she said, "for I have so much sympathy—I what was your nurse. It is my weakness. I am made so. The woman do live in this country."

"I had better make another shot, as this one has gone straight," thought Hubert. "Let me see. She may know somebody near there, who told her about Everard's brother dying in Italy, and between them they have made out this wonderful tale. Lyneham would be the nearest town where any one would be likely to have heard of that. There is no harm in trying."

"Are you sure," he said, "that she doesn't live at Lyneham ?"

"Oh!" said the woman, trying to avoid his eyes by pretending to laugh.

"I know she lives there," said he ; "so you had better tell me the truth. If you don't, I can easily find it out ; and then, you know, she will get the money and hold her tongue. Your statement would then be worth nothing. You would only be prosecuted for trying to extort money from me on false pretences, and sent to prison."

"Ah!" said she quickly, expanding her mouth into the mildest grin of which it was capable. "You was always so clever. But I only joked with you. I was going for to tell you where she lives."

"All right, I can guess who she is."

"*Già s'intende.* The great lord, think she bring the son of his brother to him, and give her the money for to be married. She married and went to America, and then she come back after she was widow—and now she is the mistress of the White Hart at Lyneham."

"Does she mean to say," thought Hubert, "that the landlady of the White Hart at Lyneham is my old nurse? Were it so, wouldn't she have come to Beynham to see us? I must go at once to the White Hart, and see what this means. I wonder what sort of a woman she really is, and what they are at."

"Very well," he said. "You see I had the clue. Now this is what I will do—and a very good bargain it is for you. I shall go to Lyneham by the first train in the morning, and I will meet you at the White Hart between ten and eleven. Here is a sovereign for your expenses there; and if she and you can prove the truth of the story you tell me, you shall be rewarded. You are quite secure, you know, because you have the game in your own hands."

"Basta," said she, holding out her hand for the sovereign.

Hubert put the coin there, and the woman of the middling countenance went forth again

to disturb the hapless landlady of the White Hart.

“A very ingenious way of extorting money,” thought Hubert, as he left the room after bowing her out; “but she might have got it up better.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

Sua confessione juguletur necesse est.—*Cic. CONTRA VERREM.*

HUBERT went by the six o'clock train to see the landlady and ferret out the trick. The woman of the middling countenance had not put up at the White Hart, but she appeared at half-past eleven in the morning, to prime her restive confederate for the cross-examination.

The latter was in a comparatively cheerful frame of mind, having just repaid old Susan and supplied a big dinner the day before, when, happening to look up, she recognised through the glass door a face of evil omen. The sight was so unpleasant and the prospects it unfolded so alarming, that she forgot prudence as well as dignity, and turning her broad back to the glass door, retreated, as far as the laws of space would permit, into a sort of recess between the window and a large cupboard, but had not been there half a minute, when she heard a light step behind, felt a playful tap on the shoulder, and saw the middling countenance peering round at her familiarly.

"Ah! my dear," said her tormentor. "What pleasure—*è proprio un*"——

"Now don't begin your gibberish," interrupted the landlady, forcing her way out of the recess. "One can't even put the linen away without having you come prying about."

"Do you put the leenen inside the wall, my dear? Well, never mind! I am not come for no money now. I am come to tell you good news. Oh! but you shall dance for joy! Give me one kiss, my dear friend."

"Get away!" grunted the landlady, putting out her hands in a defensive position.

"Ah! the human ingratitude! when I have been all over the earth for to save you money! Hear now what I shall have done for you. I have seen the man what was the child at Alassio, Master Freville, and told him that his gold and his big park, and the beasts with the corns on their heads, are not his if he do not pay money to close our mouths. Eh? eh? And he promise to give it to us—what you think of that?"

The landlady's face had become crimson, and her breathing might have been heard outside the glass door. "What?" she roared. "You great idiot! You have ruined my character and your own too, only you haven't any—ruined us both for ever, I say; and you won't get a penny from him. Don't you know an English gentleman when you see one? Couldn't you see by the look of him that young Mr. Hubert Freville (hold your tongue now, and never mind who the child was) would lose everything sooner than keep his property by telling lies or bribing such a creature as you to tell them for him?"

"Feedelsticks!—that was your word. All very

grand on the *palco scenico*, but is not true in the human life. I tell you that he hate the rival, that Jesuit there at Freville Chase. I know it, for I ask him, and he incline his head."

"Rubbish! I know better. They were the best of friends when he was staying at Freville Chase last August, and when the young squire was ill in Rome he sat up with him night after night. I know that, for the valet who is with the young squire wrote word of it to the person that told me. Why didn't you go to the Italian who helped you to take in everybody and drag me into the mess? I thought you meant that man, when you talked about getting money from somebody."

"No, no: he is only a cameriere: and also I could not find him."

"Well, you *have* made a mess of it, and if you have no shame, I have. I declare I'll leave the place now directly. I can't face it. I'll run right away, just as I am."

"Then you must run into the wall where you keep the leenen, for he will come in few minutes. Courage! you so fat—and to be afraid of him! Oh! Listen now. There is a carriage at your door. It is him. Have you understood? Now you are with the shoulders to the wall. It touches to you to save you the skin. If not—h'm! you are proper lost; because I shall say then that you have paid me money for to hold my tongue about you. Do as I say to you, I—and you shall be rich, oh! so rich!"

"I daresay. Be quiet now. Do you want to be heard by everybody? Can't you see the waiter

taking him into that sitting-room? Get into this other room, till I call you. We mustn't be seen going in together."

She opened the glass door, pushed the woman into a little room close by, and went back to meditate.

The waiter followed, and announced that Mr. Freville wanted to see her.

"In one moment," said she, pretending to look at some bills. Her meditation was short, sharp and decisive. It was short, inasmuch as there were only two things to be considered, the necessity of telling the truth and the consequences of doing so. It was sharp, for she felt as if horse-flies were stinging her all over. It was decisive, because escape was impossible.

"It's no use now," she thought. "That beast and fool has been and told him, and she can prove it, and get me made to prove it in a witness-box. *He* won't be a party to the lie—I know that, and my lord will take the law against us, and we shall get transported, and I shall be chained to her for life, and have to work in the mines—along with her! There's just one thing though, to be sure. They say the young squire is coming home to die; and as he's the last, and there's no other of the family, Mr. Hubert mightn't perhaps like to let it all go away nowhere. For nobody would be righted then. It can't be worth while to ruin himself and make an end of the family, all for one who is dying."

A little comforted by this last idea, she slid past the little room where the dangerous visitor awaited her summons, and, opening the other door

as gently as possible, stood before Hubert, or rather shuffled about on her feet till the boards creaked under her weight.

"Oh! sir," she said: "Pray don't put any trust in her—not that I mean to say it isn't true in a way, and I'm sure I've been that miserable at it, and cried my eyes out many a time all these years, and she coming and throwing it in my face, and getting money out of me till I had hardly a shilling to carry on with, and threatening to expose it all, just as if I had been the one to do it and let her in, when it was her all the time. I've led the life of a dog. I have. It *was* her—it was indeed, sir, I can take my Bible oath to that. And it does look as if God Almighty made it to come right after all—doesn't it, sir?—for it wouldn't do good to any one, to let it all go right away as it would, if, as they say, there will soon be not one of the family left—they tell me that the young squire is dying. Oh, dear! don't look so, sir. I hope you won't be hard on a poor creature that was deceived by that base woman there, and made to do what I wouldn't have done for all the world—that I wouldn't, sir: if you'll believe me, and if you'll please to listen, I can prove my words—that I will sir, indeed."

"Don't be frightened," said Hubert in the gentlest of tones. "I am not going to do you any harm. I only want to ask you a question."

"That's just what I want to tell you, sir, and I'm sure I have no other wish than"—

"I am sorry to interrupt you, but I must go back by the one o'clock train. The woman came to me yesterday, and said that she and you were

travelling from Italy to Beynham in charge of Lord de Freville's nephew, when the child died at Alassio, that she and you agreed to take home another child instead, and that I was the child you took to him as his nephew, instead of the child who died. Is this true?"

"Well sir, I am sorry to say it is in a way; but I hope you won't"—

"I won't get you into any trouble at all. On the contrary I will make it worth her while to leave you alone for the future, if you tell me the whole truth. Tell me the facts as clearly as you can, and in as few words as possible."

"I will sir," she said, crumpling the skirts of her dress with all the fingers of both hands, to repress her volubility. "I lived nurse in Mr. Freville's family, that was the brother of my lord, and when the child was to go to Beynham because he was the only one and the heir, after his poor mother died, I was sent with him, and this Italian woman too—she was nurserymaid under me, for we were two, he being so precious. Mr. Freville, he couldn't go himself, because he was so ill, and died not very long after at Sorrento, where he was when we left, and promised me a hundred pounds if I brought the child safe to Beynham. I did all I could, and never let him out of my sight for a moment, as you may say; but, in spite of all my care, he took ill, but I couldn't make out what the doctor called it, where we was stopping for the night—Alassio they called the place, I think, and he went off very quick, with only an Italian doctor there, and nothing to be had much. Well, sir, I was distracted like, for I was very partial to the

poor child; and, besides, that hundred pounds would have been the making of me, which I was engaged to be married, and we was to have bought the good-will of a small business with it. That woman began to howl like a mad thing, all out of pretence and mischief, and kept on saying (only I can't speak in her way), 'You are ruined—you are ruined—you, not me. He gave you the charge, and he promise you money—I know all about that; and now instead of giving you the money, he will have you sent to prison. They will ask me what you gave the child. Now I saw you give him something at night' (it was a little magnesia), 'and I must shrug my shoulders. Then you will go to prison and be hanged for murder.' I was so put about that I hadn't the sense to see it was all nonsense, with a doctor attending. I really didn't know what to do: I was in such a way. Well the next day, or it may be the day after that, she comes, making up a face to pretend she felt for me, and she says, 'I have saved you. I have found a child of the same age, that you can take to England. I have arranged it all—leave it to me, and it shall all be done before you are out of bed to-morrow morning. You know they would give anything for an heir, and here he is, to save everything. My lord will have an heir, and he won't miss the other, because he won't know he isn't him. You'll be doing a lot of good to the family—particularly as you've heard 'em say that if anything happened to Mr. Freville's little son, the next heir is a Catholic. So if you don't do as I say, you'll bring it to *that*, besides being hung for murder.

"That was how she talked, sir, only it was in broken English, with bits of Italian and a lot of acting about. I didn't know what to do; for there I was, and it seemed fair, upset as I was, and nobody by to say a word. But said I, 'No; I can't put off nobody's child on them.' I was so bothered, you see, and I didn't see rightly that it couldn't be proper anyhow. 'Well,' says she, 'if you'll promise not to tell, I can make you comfortable about that. You see, the father of the child I mean is a prince, and he has married again, and his second wife is a sort of a woman,—you understand,—that means her own son to be the only heir, and wouldn't be particular what she did. If you don't take the child to my lord (who will have no heir at all without him, and have you hanged as a murderer besides) that poor child will have a bad chance, I can tell you, and a beauty he is.' And then she began to make a lot of dumb show, as if she was showing he'd be made away with. 'But,' says she, 'if you'll take him to my lord, and let me have the dead child to give to the nurse for the princess, it will be all right for everybody. And I've got a cousin, a servant in this town,' says she, 'who is engaged to the *cameriere* that lives in the family, and so I know all about it; and you shall satisfy yourself that I am not deceiving you,' says she, 'for I'll bring him to see you, and you can talk to him. He speaks English, and you can ask him.' I was hard pressed, and what she said seemed fair enough to a poor creature that hardly knew what she was about; but it didn't seem right somehow, though

I couldn't say why, I was that flabbergasted. So she went out; and then, by and by, she brought the man—I didn't like the looks of him, not at all, and the child was with him—a little beauty, to be sure!

"The man, he told me his mistress was a great lady, and would give me five thousand lire (that's two hundred pounds, you know, sir) and said he'd bring the child next morning if so be he heard nothing more. Well, sir, the dear child (that was you, sir) put out its little arms so piteous-like when the man was taking it away, as if it were looking to me for protection. Indeed, sir, if you'll believe me, I couldn't stand it, to see the dear child left in that way at the mercy of such a vagabond, and no mother, and no father, as you may say. So I says to the woman, 'What's to be done to save him?' 'Nothing,' says she, 'if you won't. He must take his chance.' And then she shrugged her shoulders again and began to howl in her way. And then they went away, and the next morning I found the dear child in my room, and the coffin with the dead child in it was gone. 'What have you been and done?' says I. The woman grinned, for all the world like a monkey, and said that the dead child had been buried, and the carriage and all was ready, and we must be off to England in half an hour; and she gave me the money in a bag that the man had left for me. 'But,' I says, 'the *vetturino* will see it isn't the same child.' 'I've got another man,' says she, 'the old one has been paid off.' 'Who by?' says I. 'Why them that wanted it done, of course,' says she. 'Don't ask questions, but let's get ourselves off. You have saved a beautiful child and a

great family, and there's no harm in his not being the other one, for he's a deal better, and besides, you ain't answerable about that, because he's been put here just as if an angel had brought him. And then,' says she, 'it will set you up in life respectable.' What was I to do sir, caught in a trap like that, and no way out but what would make matters worse? I brought you to Beynham, and my lord he gave me the hundred pounds and then I married. I persuaded my husband to try America, for I felt so uncomfortable in England, and couldn't bear to look any one in the face here. He was quite agreeable, and we went and lived out there eleven years, till he died. Then I came back; for I thought 'What's the use of trying to get away from what's been done and can't be undone?' So I took this place, for I come from near Bramscote; and then that woman found me out, and has robbed and pestered me ever since, 'til my life isn't worth having, and I'd rather go to the gallows than go on so."

Here the poor woman began to cry.

"Don't be distressed," said Hubert gently. "You have nothing to fear."

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure," said she, struggling to repress her sobs, lest they should attract the middling countenance prematurely to the spot. "There's no one in the world so fitted to be my lord's heir as you are; and it would be a sin and a shame to see the family die out for the sake of making over your rights to the young squire, who is as good a gentleman as ever was, but can't live long."

"He is the greatest friend I have in the world,"

said Hubert sternly; "and were he not so, he must have his rights, if only for one hour. Have you any further evidence to give? Your statement appears to me straightforward, and so far credible; but have you anything to corroborate it, besides the word of that ill-looking woman?"

"Yes sir, I have. There's a letter, or, I should say, a packet sealed up, and in it a small miniature of the child that died, and a lock of his hair. Mrs. Freville gave it into my charge for my lord, and told me what was inside; but there! I got into the mess, and couldn't get out, and I was afraid to give it, because he would have seen the difference; for the child had light hair and blue eyes, as you will see in the picture. I'll go and get it sir, if you'll be pleased to wait a moment."

"Do; but I have a word to say first. Have you any kind of certificate from the doctor who attended the child? There must be something of the sort, to say what he died of."

"Yes sir, there was; and as we were driving away from that evil place, I looked in my bag and missed it. 'Whatever have you done with it?' I said, for I suspected it was her. 'I gave it to my cousin,' says she; 'she that's engaged to the man.' 'What use is it to them,' says I, 'with the child having an English name, and all that?' 'I can't say about that,' she says; 'but it's my belief she wants it for another business, only she wouldn't say.' And then she winked at me very cunning; 'but,' she says, 'it would never do for it to be found with us; and my cousin she gave us an English sovereign for it, and here is the money.'"

"What could I do sir? It was true that having the certificate then could do us no good, only harm; and she kept on saying that it was all for the best, and we had saved a dear child's life from those that wished him ill. So what could I do?"

"Well, it can't be helped," said Hubert. "Bring me the packet, if you please."

She opened the door softly, stole out of the room, and soon returned with a sealed packet in her hand. Hubert looked at the seal, and recognised the impression of a seal-ring given to him when a child, as having belonged to his supposed mother.

"Will you please to open it, sir?" suggested the landlady.

"No, not here: it is directed to Lord de Freville. I must take it home."

"Oh! sir, you won't show it to my lord, I hope."

"Don't be frightened. I promise that no harm shall happen to you."

"Yes sir, I know how good you are. But if his lordship knows it, what will become of me? oh dear! oh dear!"

The poor creature's lamentations were so imprudently loud that they penetrated the partition wall, and in came the woman of the middling countenance as fierce as a dragon.

"You wicked devil!" she yelled out, "you believe to get it all yourself by telling your own lies as it pleases to you; but I shall have my revenge—believe me, I shall. I shall scream it through all the town. It imports not to me. I did not

bring the child to you. I did not take him and give him to my lord for the son of his brother."

"Perhaps not," said Hubert, "but you were an accomplice; and if you get her into trouble you will get yourself into the same, I promise you."

"Excuse. I had not the intention to do her no wrong. It was the rage."

"So much the better for you. I am glad you came in, for I have something to say that concerns you to know. You think that I am going to benefit myself by your information and pay you to keep it secret. Understand me, once for all. I am not the sort of man to keep what isn't mine: and besides that, the man you suppose me to hate as you hate him—because you hate everything that isn't bad like yourself—is the best and dearest friend I have, or ever could have. If the story prove correct, as it appears to be, I shall lose no time in establishing his rights."

"You big fat fool!" said the woman, turning on the landlady like a cat spitting at an overgrown puppy. "You hypocrite, what ought to be a *monaca*, if you was a Christian"——

"*Basta così!*" said Hubert decisively, and his eyes corroborated the statement. "I can't stay to hear any more strong language. Now attend to what I say, for I must be going. You must remain here a few days, and you must come with her when I send for you both, and you must give straightforward answers to such questions as may be put to you. If you do that"——

"Misericordia! They will put me in the galley."

"No, they won't. I will answer for your safety."

"You will protect the poor leetle woman?"

"I have already told you that you shall be quite safe."

"And you will not forget to give some leetle reward?"

"You mustn't talk about being rewarded for passing off one child as another and trying to make money out of it, first from one side, and then from the other. You are getting off very easily, I can tell you that. But I will make you a present as alms, because you tell me that you are poor; and, if you can tell me the name of my real father and mother and show me sufficient evidence to prove it, I will make you a very handsome present."

The middling countenance fell, and the answer came in a whimpering tone. "I should not know," she said. "My cousin not married herself with the man. She go to France, I do not know in what part of it, and she never would tell to me the name of the man, nor of the prince."

Hubert felt himself turning deadly pale, as he thought of Elfrida and his own nameless identity; but the very thought made him regain command over himself, and he said with apparent calmness:

"It can be done. I can help you to do it. Lord de Freville will pay the expenses of your journey, I know, if I can't. It must be done."

Then he turned to the landlady, and said in a softer voice, "I must go now. I depend on you to be ready with the evidence, yours and hers, when I shall want it, which will be very soon. Be assured that you will not lose by it."

"Anything I can do, I'm sure I will, and be thankful," said the landlady. "And I was just

going to remark that there was a foreigner came here last August that looked to me very like the man we were talking of. He came here with nothing to do that I could see, and ordered a lot of kickshaws for his dinner, to make believe he was a gentleman. He was got up to disguise himself, so I thought, and seemed the very man, only I couldn't justly swear to him. I don't know where he went."

"I don't think much of that," said Hubert; "but however that may be, you will find it worth while, both of you, to find out what I want to know. Just write her name for me, in full, if you please, on the back of this card."

She did so, and he left the room, saying as she followed him out, "Remember, I hold you responsible for her appearance when she is wanted. You must keep her here, for you mustn't lose sight of her. She isn't a pleasant guest, I know; but I can't help that. It *must* be done."

He then left the house.

"Good gracious!" thought the unfortunate landlady. "Whatever am I to do? What will they all think, to see her here with me, after my sending her off as I did three months ago? It's too much for any one, it is. I'll sit down and have a good cry."

She retired into her bedroom, fulfilled her purpose comfortably in an arm-chair, and having settled her cap, went back refreshed into Number 1 sitting-room, where the middling countenance was waiting.

"You may stay in the house till you are wanted," she said, "and you can sit in the room

where you were just now. They will show you your bedroom presently, and bring your things from the Brown Bear, if that was where you put up last night."

"Yes, but are you sure that I shall not be put in the galley? If not, I escape away. Do not tell me lies, for I know your facts."

"And don't you be a fool, after getting off so cheap. Don't you know a gentleman when you see him? Do as he tells you, and you will find it to your advantage. You go into that sitting-room. I'll send you the '*Ledchester Gazette*' to amuse you, and give orders about your things. I can't stay any longer, for I have lots of business to do."

"Then I shall have the felicity to remain with my dear old friend. Your company shall be dear to me."

The landlady bounced out of the room, muttering, "None of that nonsense now," and the woman of the middling countenance retired into the small sitting-room, where, after turning over a few leaves of the "*Sunday at Home*" in a dejected spirit, she tried to amuse herself by looking out of the window at such objects as a country town affords for inspection on market days.

CHAPTER XXX.

EXACTLY three weeks and five days after Hubert's interview with the landlady of the White Hart and the woman of the middling countenance, Mrs. Roland was preparing for Everard's return to Freville Chase. Hubert had written beforehand, advising her to get ready the king's room because it was on the groundfloor, and saying that he would be there himself before four o'clock, about which time Everard was expected. His train was late, and he had to walk from the station with his carpet-bag in his hand, having forgotten to tell her what train he was coming by ; so that it was nearly four when he passed the old gatehouse. He found Mrs. Roland in the hall, looking out for Everard.

"It was so kind of you to write sir, about the king's room," she said, and then she burst into tears.

Hubert pressed her hand warmly, and said :

"I hope we shall find him better."

She shook her head sadly, keeping her eyes fixed on the gatehouse.

"He was better when I left Rome," said Hubert, "and his constitution is very strong."

"Yes sir : but that isn't it. You may break

anything by straining it the wrong way. I was afraid all along that something would happen. It looked so bad, that going off abroad and making believe it was health. But, if you please sir, what was it that made him take that dreadful ride across country to catch the train, and then travel all the way as he was? That alone was enough to kill him."

"Why that scoundrel got hold of her letter, and kept it back on purpose to make him too late."

Anne, who had been watching behind the portière for Everard's arrival, could restrain herself no longer.

"Please, sir," said she, coming forward and curtsying, "I kept on telling them he ought to be took up."

Hubert smiled faintly, but was altogether too anxious and miserable to be amused even for an instant.

"You were quite right," he said. "I only wish it could have been done."

"Well, sir, but mightn't he have been took up for a vagrant, when he was caught a-poking about in the tower late at night?"

"What's the use of talking like that?" said Mrs. Roland in a tone of melancholy reproof, "when you know he was visiting in the house all the time?"

"But he had no business in there," persisted Anne, "and it's my belief—but, however, it doesn't signify talking—it's too late now. I too sir, felt that something must happen; for sir—you won't think me superstitious—but it must have been four,

may be five nights after the squire went away, and I was lying awake grieving for him and knowing what a journey he must have had in all that bitter weather, when I heard the Freville bell, that betokens the death of a Freville, sounding far away over the Chase woods. I couldn't mistake it, though I hadn't heard it for many years, and it tolled all through that dreadful night. The next morning your telegraph, sir, came to tell us how ill he was, and then"——

"Hush!" said Mrs. Roland, "isn't that the carriage?"

The whole household had now collected together silently in the hall, as if by magic, and in a few moments the wreck of Everard Freville was brought to the door in the old family coach,—drawn by the horses that he had chosen for Ida.

The change in his appearance was startling, yet no one, however slightly acquainted with him, would have doubted his identity. The powerful frame had lost nothing of its form, but its elastic vigour was gone, and he moved slowly, with a perceptible effort. His face was very pale, almost white, with a slight tinge of a delicate pink at times, like the inside of a shell. The old smile was there, and more beautiful than ever, but its expression was purely objective, as if self had no longer a place on earth.

Mrs. Roland's fortitude gave way when she saw him. She seized both his hands, and sobbed as if her heart would break.

"But I am so much better now," he said. "*Doctor Ranston* will tell you that I am."

"Do try," said she. "We shall all break down and go to rack and ruin, if you don't."

She walked on, and after a few words of kindly greeting to the other servants, he followed her across the hall.

"Mr. Hubert," she said, "thought that the king's room would be best for you to sleep in, because—you would be tired."

"Thank you and him both. I was just thinking how convenient it would be."

"I have got it all ready, and brought everything down that I thought you would like to have there, if you will please to look. I didn't get ready the tower-room, but both fires have been burning for several days in the great gallery."

"Is Father Merivale at home?" asked Everard. "I should like so much to see him."

"No sir. He was obliged to go to Exbourne, but he will be back soon."

Hubert had waylaid Dr. Ranston in the hall, and after a few words of inquiry, said:

"Would it be safe to speak to him on an important and painful subject that he *must* hear very soon?"

"Does it refer to what has made him as he now is?" said Dr. Ranston, as they walked into the gallery.

"No, it has nothing to do with that."

"Then you may, and the sooner the better. He has borne the journey pretty well, and got through his most touching reception. You had better say what you have to say as soon as possible, for there will be a reaction—probably to-morrow."

"You don't mean anything serious, I hope?"

"No—I trust not. But if it ought to be said soon, it should be said now. I must tell you that when we were in London yesterday, I called in two of the best men I know for the heart, to see him, and we had a long consultation. They examined him with the utmost attention, and it grieves me more than I can express to tell you that their opinion of his case was not more hopeful than my own. He insisted on being present all the time during the consultation, and when we had finished, he said, without the slightest change of countenance, that he had never had any other opinion after he had begun to get better."

At that moment Everard came into the gallery. Dr. Ranston said a few words about the beauty of the room and of the place altogether: then he retired till dinner-time, on the plea of having letters to write.

Everard unwittingly introduced the subject by asking how Lord de Freville was.

"He was rather better again when I left," said Hubert; "but the doctors, I am sorry to say, give me no hope of his recovery. Did you get my letter in Paris, telling you all about him—that he had been so anxious to see you?"

"I did, and from things he said when I was at Beynham I half expected to hear what that letter told me. The beautiful simplicity of his character would be sure to lead him straight, if he could see his way at all. It was a delightful surprise to find you here; but, if he is in so critical a state you ought not to stay."

"No, I thought of going back as early as I can to-morrow, or, if you think it better, by the mail

train to-night. I was obliged to come, first and foremost because I should not have felt satisfied without seeing for myself how you were, and secondly because I have some things to say that are of extreme importance, that you *must* know, and that you will hear best by word of mouth from me. There is nothing in them that concerns you, as *yourself*—you understand me?”

“I do, and thoroughly appreciate your way of putting it: but you needn’t be afraid in any case. Whatever it may be, it can’t well be worse than what I have heard and seen and known and inferred. I have heard one thing that I did want to hear very much. I mean your being engaged to Elfrida. She is a noble girl, one whose equal it would be hard indeed to find, and I don’t know any one so fitted for her as yourself. I saw her in Paris on my way through. She came to see me. I heard of your having been there, and all about it but not from her, till the maid who came with her, had told me in spite of her.”

“I was going to tell you myself. It was very wrong, I know; but what could a fellow do, in such a position as I found myself in?”

“I know exactly how it was, for I drew it out of her. I am quite sure that, if I had been you, just as you were then, I should have done the same. But don’t do such things again, for you know better now.”

“I promise you that nothing shall induce me to do it, whatever provocation I may have. But I hope they will keep him out of my way. Have you heard what she did?”

“Yes, it was just what I should have expected

her to do. I know what she is. You have won a treasure, even greater perhaps than you are yet fully aware of. You will, I know, make the most of it."

"You may rest assured that I will, if I can: but things have happened since that no one can alter, and they have put me into a difficulty with regard to her that nothing can mend. Didn't an Italian woman come here last October and try to get money out of you for promising to tell you of a property that you ought to have?"

"Yes, and became abusive at not getting it. She called me a Jesuit, an aristocrat sucking the blood of the peoples, and so on. I think she began by promising to make me an alderman."

"I daresay. She was likely enough to make that sort of mistake. But what she really had to tell you was that I am not the son of my supposed father, not a Freville at all, and therefore that you"——

"Where did she pick up that nonsense? Why Sir Richard knew your father, and was at Beynham when the news of your birth came there."

"Yes, but I am not his son. Here are the facts: That woman came to me at Beynham—it was in the evening, and I had arrived there early that morning from Paris. She told me that she and the landlady of the White Hart at Lyneham had been the two nurses sent home with the child to take him to Beynham, that the child was taken ill and died at Alassio, and that they, for fear of being charged with neglect or worse, brought another child to Beynham instead. I *didn't* believe her story, for her manner was not

satisfactory ; so I manœuvred till I got the name and address of the other woman. I went to Lyneham the next morning and saw her. She confirmed the story, and told me other things that I will tell you by and by, and she gave me a packet entrusted to her by the child's mother for his uncle. I took it with me and gave it to Lord de Freville. He opened it in my presence. There was a letter, with a lock of the child's hair, and there was a miniature of him. The hair was flaxen, and the eyes were light blue. There can be no doubt as to the authenticity of both, for the packet was sealed with a seal-ring well known to have belonged to my supposed mother. I have it now, and have had it ever since she died, and my uncle, as I call him from habit and still more from affection, can swear to it. The English nurse had been promised a hundred pounds for bringing the child home safely, as his father was too ill to come ; so that besides losing the chance of that, if she had told of his death, she would have lost two hundred pounds more, the bribe offered her for substituting the other. Why that money was given and by whom, I can't find out. The Italian woman pretends that my father was a prince, and that his second wife wanted to get rid of me ; but she can't tell me anything more, though she has been offered a large sum of money to do so. To make a long story short, both the women came to Beynham and were examined by a lawyer on oath. The evidence was complete."

"I don't care what it is, or what the lawyers think," said Everard. "I don't believe a word of

it. The woman stole the seal-ring and the miniature, and got a lock of hair, and trumped up the story with the help of the other woman."

"No, it couldn't be. When I send you the whole evidence, as I will in two or three days, you will see"—

"I don't care what they say. Lawyers are not infallible. I believe my own eyes. You are a Freville—I am certain of that—and you can be no one else than the one you have been supposed to be, for there is no other. What did Lord de Freville say to this wonderful story?"

"He couldn't resist the evidence, and no one could. I ought to have told you that the women gave it unwillingly, for they were afraid of being prosecuted, and he made a will at once, leaving me all that was not entailed, and speaking of me in terms that I don't deserve, but value immensely as coming from one who has been a father to me, and much more than most fathers are. Nothing can exceed his kindness to me. He has been, if possible, kinder since than before."

"I am sure that he would; but so he ought. I wish you would send me the evidence as soon as you can. There is a fallacy somewhere, and I am determined to find it out, or get it found out."

"I will; but I am sure of the fact."

"You can't be. You have only the word of these two women, and their evidence is good for nothing by itself. Look here. The Italian woman had evidently been working out the scheme for a long time, or she wouldn't know, for instance, that I come next, so far off as I am.

She must have heard that, when she was nurse-maid in your father's house. Now what was to prevent her or the other woman buying a miniature, getting a seal made from the impression, opening the packet, and putting the miniature inside? They could get the seal made in London in a few days; and there was no check on their time, travelling slowly as they were, in charge of a small child. Then they kept their plan secret until the time was ripe for its accomplishment—until they knew that you were of age, and would have power to find them money, and that I was in a position likely to be tempted by the promise of wealth. It was a profound calculation of that Italian woman's, based on the evil in human nature. Or, supposing the scheme to have been recently concocted, how easy it would be for them to buy a miniature anywhere, or have one copied from some old one, with the proper colouring. And no doubt, as the nurse was liked and trusted by your father and mother, she would have a letter of your mother's by her, sealed most likely with that very ring. It was easy to take off the impression with plaster-of-Paris, and get some old paper, and make the ink look faded with a rusty nail—all these things can be done. The Italian woman showed clearly what her scheme was. First she came to me, thinking that, as I should be the gainer, she would get a larger sum of money from me, and of course be safe from prosecution. It was not till she had failed with me that she went to you. The other woman may be an accomplice, or a dupe, or both with a touch of monomania. I wonder whether she drinks?"

"No. There was no symptom of drinking nor of monomania. She gave her evidence distinctly, and no cross-examination could shake it in the least. Besides, the child is remembered to have had fair hair and blue eyes."

"Does Lord de Freville remember it?"

"Yes, for he was at Sorrento with his brother when the child was born. He says that he asked, when I was brought to Beynham afterwards, how it was that I was so dark, and they told him that it was living in the climate of Southern Italy up to the time I was three years old."

"You have staggered but not convinced me," said Everard. "If God spares my life, I will get to the bottom of this, and if not, others will. I shall take legal advice, and work the thing out, if I have to send agents all over the world about it. Don't you see how important it is?"

"No. All I want is to be the legitimate son of a sufficiently well-born father, and to find out who he is or was. That *is* important—fearfully important to me on account of Elfrida. As for the rest, I see that you are much better fitted than I am to"—

"I deny the fact: but you are a noble-hearted fellow, to feel as you do in such a case as this is. However it is like you, and what one might have expected. Anyhow, fitted or not fitted, I am now out of the question, as regards the future of this old family, which must die out if you are excluded from the succession. And when I say that, I mean a great deal more, but especially as regards this place, which concerns me most. I mean the *uprooting* of customs, habits and traditions that

belong to past ages and no longer grow. I mean the destruction of all those old ties between class and class, that still exist within this house and property because they have never been broken. I mean the loss of moral support to this mission, and to the poor Catholics belonging to it. I could enlarge on this very much without exhausting the subject, and put it much more strongly; but I have said enough to show that your exclusion could only be an unmitigated evil. I say 'could be,' for it shall not be. If other people believe in the imposture of that woman who has gone about trying to trade on it, I don't; and were it true, *per impossibile*, you would still be the only man I happen to know whom I could trust to carry on and transmit the traditions of Freville Chase. Your parentage would be a puzzle, but couldn't raise a doubt at your expense in anyway. Does Lord de Freville really mean to act on the statement of a common impostor?"

"He can't help it. You will see when I send you the evidence. By the by, I have a letter from him for you in my bag. I will go and get it."

"Wait a moment. I wish to tell you that the day after you left Rome, I sent instructions for a will, leaving everything to you. I am going to write now to have you differently described, for fear of mistakes. I have only one request to make, and from my knowledge of you I have reason to be sure that you will feel no difficulty about it, but rather the reverse. It is that you will live here. You see, this is the old family place. They went to Beynham in later days—

days that you will not think of now with satisfaction, as regards England and as regards the elder line. You are fond of Freville Chase, and so is Elfrida—I think she loves it as much as I do, which is saying a great deal. How much good you may do by living here, and how much harm you might do by living elsewhere, you are capable of knowing, and you know. There is no need for me to say more.”

There was not indeed. These few words had compelled Hubert to realise what the opinion of three physicians had failed to make him believe. The blow came upon him now as suddenly as if he had never before been warned of it. He answered without delay or reflection, because there was only one thing to say; but he spoke with effort, and his voice trembled very much.

“You may feel confident,” he said, “that I will do as you wish, and do it to the best of my power, because it is your wish, which would be sufficient in itself, and also because I feel about it exactly as you feel in every respect. But, in Heaven’s name, do try to live. Try for my sake. You can’t imagine what the loss of you would be to me. If I could only make you see it, I am sure that you would try. I owe to you my religion and Elfrida—which means everything. Do one thing more for me: it is all I want besides Elfrida. Try to live.”

“I will,” said Everard, rising from his chair. “I should have been dead a month ago, if I had not made a fight of it for your sake. But I will go on trying: I will indeed. I must write this letter now. Don’t be alarmed at what I have told you.

Preparing for a thing doesn't make it happen any sooner. If making a will shortened one's life, there would be very few of them at Doctors' Commons, I think. Have you said anything about this absurd imposture to Sir Richard Dytchley?"

"Yes. I wrote to him and to Elfrida yesterday."

"I am glad of it; but I shall write too to-day or to-morrow, and tell him my version of the story, and what I mean to do about it and about you."

"Don't write yet. You are taking too much out of yourself, after your illness and the journey, and this worrying thing at the end of it."

"I am not going to worry myself about a big bogey that will vanish when one faces it; but I must write to Sir Richard as soon as I can, for otherwise Elfrida will get into difficulties with Lady Dytchley."

"Yes; but unhappily you can't prove who I am. That will be the difficulty."

"It shall not be. Leave me to manage it."

Everard began to write his letter to the lawyer, and Hubert left the room. He found Dr. Rans-ton reading a newspaper in the hall.

"Is it over?" he said.

"Yes, and well over. It didn't excite him, though it was a very worrying business. I am only afraid of his working too much at it."

"Don't be afraid of that. The more he is taken out of the past the better. I don't care how much he thinks, as long as he doesn't think of one thing. But that can't be shut out. It can only be obscured more or less. You have done a

good thing by having brought him something to think of and work out. You can't do more."

"Dr. Ranston," said Hubert, "after all that you have done for him, and for me through him, you ought to know what it is that has brought him to this. Had I remained a little longer in Rome, I should have told you before."

"I do know it," said Dr. Ranston, "(the main facts at least) from Sir Richard Dytchley. He came to see us in Paris, and he spoke to me privately. He was in a very excited state, and no wonder. A more wanton waste of a most valuable life I never heard of, nor a worse instance of wrong prevailing over right, and the lesser power over the greater, by the merely negative force of unscrupulousness. How long do you stay?"

"Only till to-morrow morning. And you?"

"If he is well enough, I must return to my duties in London the day after: but I shall be here again. It is unfortunate that you can't be with him just now. You must ask the priest to see as much of him as he can."

Everard had now finished the letter to his lawyer, and Hubert, returning to the gallery, brought Lord de Freville's to him. It was short, but very warmly expressed with regard to both, and referred Everard to Hubert for a full account of all that had occurred. There was a postscript with these words:

"I should very much like to see you; but don't come if it would do you harm. I have one thing more to say, as there is little chance of my seeing you, I am afraid, and it is important. When you

were born, my father, who was then alive, established in a regular way your claim to the peerage, for fear it should become extinct, as I was five and forty, and not married, and my younger brother had no son then. So you will have no trouble about that. Your father knew it at the time, but he died when you were so young that you may not have heard it. God bless you! Try to get well as soon as you can."

Everard handed the letter to Hubert, and when he had returned it, said with a resolute smile :

"One good turn deserves another. I mean to establish your claim, or rather disestablish the imposture that disputes your right. If I remain as well as I am at present I shall go to Beynham in a day or two ; for I feel bound, if possible, to do so on every account. In the meantime I shall let him know by letter what I think about the story, and what I am going to do. You must take it, I will write it now."

He had hardly said the words when his face turned white, with a shadow over it.

"I am afraid—I can't—just now," he said, pausing to take breath painfully. "I don't feel quite well. I shall be all right presently—tomorrow."

Hubert ran into the hall and called Doctor Ranston, who came immediately.

"I knew there would be something of this kind," said he. "He has done a little too much. We must get him into his room at once."

They carried him into the king's room and laid him on the sofa.

"He must be perfectly quiet for the next four and twenty hours at least," said Doctor Ranston. "He must see no one, talk to no one, not even the priest. He might be seriously thrown back by not being left as he is till he has got over this attack. Knowing what I know, I expected it."

They watched beside him for some time silently. When he appeared to be somewhat better, Hubert took the doctor's arm and, walking to the other end of the room, said in a low voice :

"What can I do? How can I leave him in this state? I can't go to-morrow morning."

"I hope you will be able to do so," said Doctor Ranston. "I shall know more by and by. Of course these attacks are always to be dreaded; but I don't think there will be any more danger, after it has passed off, than there always is, and must be, and will be. But you might make it worse by staying, for it would worry him to know that you were here when duty calls you to be with Lord de Freville."

"I see. There is one more thing I have to ask. He talked of going to Beynham if he was well enough; but I can't think it can be safe at present."

"Certainly not. He must not do so on any account. When the weather is warmer, he may get on horseback and ride about quietly; but he will not be in a fit state yet a while even for that. As for going to Beynham, or travelling at all, it is not to be thought of at present. I have brought him home so soon at the greatest risk, and I wouldn't have attempted it if I had not seen that he was becoming dangerously anxious to be at

home. I have succeeded so far as to get him here ; but you see what a severe attack the exertion of travelling has brought on, in spite of all my precautions. I trust, as I have said, that there will be no increase of danger. But danger there is, must be, will always be, and the least want of caution at any time might prove fatal. I don't wish to alarm you unnecessarily, but I am obliged to tell you the whole truth, so that you may know how to act when you come again. But look there—he is beckoning to you."

Hubert went up to the sofa and bent over to listen.

"You will go to-morrow morning, I hope," said Everard in a very faint voice.

"Yes—be sure that I will."

"And tell him what I was going to write."

"Exactly as you told me."

"And tell him what I think about that story, and what I mean to do about it."

"Every word. You may feel satisfied that I will convey the meaning of your letter just as if you had written it."

"Thank you. And about my will."

"Yes. I will tell him everything you have said to me to-day."

"Thank you. I wish to see Father Merivale. Please, go for him."

Hubert moved away towards the door, and turning to the doctor said :

"What am I to do, after what you told me?"

"Go," said Dr. Ranston. "I see it won't do to interfere with him about that."

CHAPTER XXX.



EVERARD was of opinion that we are slow to believe what is painful :

Tarde, quæ credita lædunt, credimus.

And Dr. Ranston, who had not forgotten his classics, thought of the passage when he found that Hubert was again inclined to believe in Everard's recovery.

"I only wish I could believe it myself," thought the doctor, as the carriage drove away with Hubert and his bag early in the morning.

Everard was much better, and could do anything that could be done while lying down. Between ten and eleven o'clock, he said :

"I think I could sit up. I want to write an important letter to Sir Richard Dytechley."

"Yes, but don't," said the doctor. "Give me till to-morrow morning. Stay on the sofa as you are for to-day : you will find the advantage of it. Here are some letters that came by the post. I wouldn't let them be brought to you before, for quiet is so imperatively necessary."

Everard began to read his letters, and Sir Richard was doing the same thing at the same time in Paris : but the effect was not the same. Everard, having read his, laid them down languidly without any sign of interest.

Sir Richard chose one out of several, read a few lines, and rising uneasily from the breakfast table, betook himself to the window.

"What is the matter?" said Lady Dytechley, "and what is the matter with *you*, Elfrida? There is something wrong I see, though you try to hide it."

Sir Richard looked ruefully at the Rue de Rivoli, and wished there was a ladder to descend by. Lady Dytechley pursued him. Elfrida profited by the pursuit and disappeared.

"Now, what is it? I must know," said Lady Dytechley.

"There's nothing pleasant for you to know, and not likely to be," answered Sir Richard in a testy voice.

"And why not, pray? Ida hasn't made such a *very* bad marriage, and Everard is getting over it, as Mr. Exmore did, who was *much* more in love with her; and Elfrida's marriage is, I am sure, all that could be wished, as you have said yourself over and over again."

"I know that—and I'll take good care that nothing comes between them. But perhaps you won't like it so much when you have read this. Here it is in black and white."

She took the letter, and holding it close, began to read it with dilated eyes.

"Go on," muttered Sir Richard, who having got over the first inclination to run away, was seized with a strange wish to provoke hostilities. "Go on," he repeated, standing in front of her, and emitting sounds of grim hilarity. "Go on!"

She did go on, for her interest in the letter was

too great to be taken off by the exasperating sounds and postures that symbolised Sir Richard's desire to speak his mind. She read it half through, and then her face reddened, and then crimsoned, and then—but the sentence must be left unfinished, for want of an appropriate verb.

"What can this mean?" she gasped. "It must be—it must be a practical joke of somebody, out of spite."

"It's practical enough," said Sir Richard, "but there's no joke in it, I can tell you. Read away."

"Not if you keep jumping about like that. Do go further off. What's come to you?"

He retired a few paces, and then she finished the letter.

"Well?" said he. She heaved a heavy sigh, and looked in blank amazement at nothing.

"Well?" he repeated, drawing near again.

"Very, very shocking!" said she. "Such a dreadful blow to us all. Who could ever have dreamt of this? Poor dear Elfrida! Such a dreadful kind of disappointment!"

"What! Beynham and the peerage, eh?"

"For shame, to accuse me of that!"

"Well, I can't see any other disappointment in it. *He* hasn't disappointed her in any way that I know of."

"But you could never dream of letting her marry a man without a name?"

"Name, or no name, I don't care," said Sir Richard, taking back the letter and pocketing it. "He is as good a fellow as can be, and she likes *him*, and there it is."

Lady Dytechley felt, like the Marquis Moncalvo, that she must :

Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n.

"I am very, very sorry for it," she said, "of course I am. Do you suppose that nobody but yourself feels anything? It's a dreadful, dreadful blow; and I would have done anything to save poor dear Elfrida from it, which is more than you would have done, or you wouldn't have gone riding off all day when you might have saved everything, and saved Everard, and all the misery and disgrace you have brought upon us, instead of being a support to me, who was so ill, and might have been saved from having to go abroad, which brought everything upon us, if you had only had the heart to take the trouble, instead of deserting me, and—oh! you really ought to be ashamed of it. And now you try to make black white, just to screen yourself, just because you know that, if it hadn't been for Everard's troubles, that were all your fault, as I have shown, *he* wouldn't have been so much at Freville Chase, and wouldn't have been engaged to Elfrida, and all this wouldn't have happened."

"What's all this about?" said Sir Richard. "You kept on making a row all that day, and swearing that the doctors would have you go abroad. I wish I had stood it out; but I didn't, and there it is, and I shall never forgive myself. You said just now that Everard had got over it. I only wish you had seen him since, as I have, and heard what the doctor said. And now, since you know from that letter that he must be Lord

de Freville, you are sorry for what you have done, and try to lay it all on me. I have been weak and a great fool, and all because I neglected my religion ; but you never rested till you had done all the mischief : and you *have* done it. You had lived long enough to know at least what Everard's position was worth, as a Freville of Freville Chase ; but you wouldn't listen to anything. And now Ida is miserable for life, and Everard, the only son of the dearest friend I ever had, is dying slowly, and the whole race will be extinct. If you had acted honestly, Ida would now be living in peace and happiness at Freville Chase, and all the old property of the Frevilles would centre in Everard, with the old peerage into the bargain. You have lost all this, and lowered yourself in the opinion of all your friends. And for what ? On the wild goose-chase of trying to make Ida break faith with Everard. And you did this, knowing that she was devoted to him. You went on at it after she had indignantly refused Exmore. You went on at it to the last, playing into the hands of that scoundrel Moncalvo, till the poor child didn't know what she was doing. And what, if it had answered ? What, if you had succeeded in so corrupting her heart, that she could have been capable of such a cold-blooded breach of faith to such a man as Everard, and after being engaged to him all her life ? What would you have really gained, even as the things were then ? What have *you* got by it personally ? You have made yourself a by-word to all your friends, and the one you made up to about it *won't* speak to you in your own county. See if

she does! The very one you made up to! There never was such "——"

An inarticulate but rather loud protest from Lady Dytechley brought his speech to a close.

"I didn't make up to her," she said. "It's a wicked story. She made up to me all along about it, and was *most anxious* for the match. It's very heartless, and cruel, and unjust, and unmanly of you, to put everything on me just because Everard didn't get Ida's letter in time. And what has all this to do with the unfortunate young man who was put out of his proper position by a nurserymaid palming him off as Lord de Freville's nephew?"

"'Proper position'? You can't have read his letter through."

"Of course I read it through. But you don't mean to say that you believe the woman's account of his birth? Why, can't you see on the face of it who he is?—some relation of hers or of the Italian housemaid she talks of. Can't you see why she palmed him off as the child they were bringing to Beynham? And can't you see that she would of course make him out to be the son of some great person, to screen herself and set Lord de Freville looking about for the father, and make him give her money on the strength of it, instead of prosecuting her for conspiracy?"

"I don't believe he's anything of the sort; but whatever he is, Elfrida shall not be interfered with. It's enough to have made Ida marry a man she hates, and murdered Everard who she was devoted to, and snuffed out the whole line of the Frevilles, without ruining Hubert, whose

praises you were always singing till this moment, and knocking the bloom off Elfrida's young life. I know it was my fault at the beginning, and I know why it was. I shall be glad to tell you why another time, for it may be of use to you, if you will listen; but I can't have any more mischief done through my fault. I don't care for anybody. Elfrida shall marry him, if he's the son of a chimney-sweep. And I won't stand any delays and doctors and sparks flying upward. I told him in my last letter that they had better wait till the autumn; but I declare now I won't make him wait more than three months for anybody or anything. Whoever is at it, or not at it, it sha'n't be put off beyond that. I shall write and tell him so now, directly, and put the letter in the post myself."

Having thus unburdened his mind and his conscience of an intolerable load, which had been accumulating for many years, he turned on his heel and walked away.

"Oh! but do stop a moment," said Lady Dytechley, running after him in hot haste. "Only think what you are committing yourself to!"

"I *have* thought," said he, opening the door just wide enough to let himself out, "I have done nothing but think."

"But you *must* see"——

"I see what I ought to do, and must do, and will do; and there is an end of it."

The door closed behind him, and Lady Dytechley remained standing inside, staring into space.

Sir Richard went to Elfrida's room, knocked


at the door, and pushing it half open, looked in, saying:

"Never mind. You shall marry him all the same. I don't care for anybody."

He then wrote a letter to Hubert in the same sense, and walked forth into the Rue di Rivoli, saying to himself:

"I shouldn't wonder at all now if that red-whiskered fellow were at the bottom of it. He's always blundering and getting somebody into trouble."

CHAPTER XXXI.

VERARD became so much better after his last attack, that in three days Dr. Ranston left Freville Chase, intending to return from time to time for a few hours. Hubert had not forwarded a copy of the evidence, the original being still in the hands of the lawyers.

Everard waited a few days, and then wrote to the head of the firm as follows :

“ Dear Sir,—

“ As I am personally interested in the inquiry now going on about the succession to Beynham and the Barony of De Freville, I think that I am entitled to see the evidence which has been brought forward on the subject. My real motives however are, that I disbelieve the statement ; that I have a strong objection to being made into a wrongful heir, nolens volens ; that I have every possible reason for wishing to prevent such a result in this case, and that I am determined to unravel a conspiracy of whose existence I have no doubt whatever. By sending me a copy of the documents you will oblige me very much, help the cause of justice, and save the family from extinction, as my life is not worth a day’s purchase. Of course I shall defray the cost

of the copying, and any other expenses connected with it. I am, dear sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"Everard Freville."

Whilst he was directing this letter, two people were arriving in a fly from Lyneham. One was the landlady of the White Hart, whom he had summoned by a strongly worded note, the other was old Susan. When they entered the room the landlady hung back, and Susan, making a decisive curtsy, opened the case in these words :

"Please, Squire, she were that frightened at coming as she sent for me to come along with her, 'because,' says she, 'I knows he'll take the law of me, and give a warrant in course, as he's a magistrate.' But I hopes you'll look over it, sir, for you see she were took in, she were, and had to do with what they call a transaction, which Mrs. Atherstone (that's my missis ever since I were a bit of a girl) told me particlar not to get into a transaction as always leads to some unpleasantness, as were how all this trouble come on my poor niece Eliza, that's her as keeps the White Hart, only she's that frightened, she can't say nothing for herself. But if you'll believe me, squire (you knows Mrs. Atherstone, and she'll tell you I wouldn't tell no lies), she didn't mean no harm, but were let in, as I were a-saying, by that nasty deceitful thing as lugged her into a transaction; and it's my belief, Squire, as that man were at the bottom of this—him as come to the White Hart, a-pretending to be a foreigner, and went prowling about at the Four Ways, and

would have broke into the house, only I took and fetched the blunderbuss (I ain't afraid of firearms which my father lived under-keeper at Hazeley), and he made off pretty quick; and if Muggles (that's the p'liceman) had took him up when I told him what the man was, we shouldn't have had this good-for-nothing creature a-coming with a story as no one can't make out. And you may depend on it them two were in league together. Muggles kep' all on a-saying he hadn't no charge to make again him; but what's the good of the law (no offence, I hope, Squire), if a vagabond like that is to be let go about, getting respectable people into trouble, and sending that other woman as my missis picked up off the door-step, as no doubt was in league with him, like the foreigneering one, to take in Mrs. Atherstone as kep' her for months in the house, and then she made off the day that chap came prowling about. When I was young they'd have took and clapped him into the stocks, and he wouldn't have come about no more. He'd have broke into the house if I hadn't fetched the blunderbuss; and if Muggles had took him up, we should have been shut of him; but I couldn't get nothing done, and the fellow, in course, was was very spiteful about it, and so they, he and the women. (that's the foreigneering one, and her as called herself Jane Davis) brought out a old transaction and lugged poor Eliza into this mess. But if you'll believe me, Squire, she couldn't have meant nothing. She were a very good child always, and particlar industrious, and did as she were bid. I think sir, *if it ain't taking a liberty*, as you might be able to

set a trap for the varmint and catch 'em in it, which they're no better nor varmint, and not so good neither, for it ain't their nature to go poaching about, and they knows better, and so, as I were a-saying"——

"Very true," said Everard. "Sit down, if you please, and let me hear the rights of it, that I may see if I can help you in any way. I don't quite understand what you want me to do."

This last remark was addressed to the landlady; but old Susan had come there to speak for her niece, and she meant to do it.

"Please sir," she said, "the poor thing is that put about as she don't know whether she's a-standing on her head or her heels. You see, sir, when she was in foreign parts, a-bringing home!"——

"I have heard all that. What I want to know is, how *you*" (here he fixed his eyes on the landlady) "heard that I was the next heir. I am a long way off. How did you know that there was no one between?"

"Well, sir," said the landlady, "it wasn't my knowing it that brought about all this trouble. It was that Italian nursery-maid that took advantage of knowing it, and kept it back because she should be able, as she thought, to get money from one side or the other. But we both heard of it at the same time."

"Thank you. I should be glad to know how and when."

"It was one evening sir, at supper. Mr. Freville's man came down, and said the talk at dinner had been about a letter from my lord,

telling how he had just made it right and square before the House of Lords, and established the claim of the child at Freville Chase,—that was you, sir, to be the heir, and how he had begun five years before, when you was born, and the lawyers and them had been all that time about it, and he was so glad he had done it, whereby he had been afraid that the title would come to be extinct. And Mr. Freville and his friends laughed about it, to think how pleased his father (that was my lord then) would be to hear of the fine baby that was just born—which was Mr. Freville's only son, he that died and was the cause (poor little innocent) of all this dreadful business. And then Mr. Freville's man said it was a good thing, for they was all black Papists (begging your pardon, sir) at Freville Chase. 'What's that?' I said, for I didn't know what he meant."

"You'll please to excuse her ignorance, as didn't know no better, Squire," interrupted Susan. "I were every bit as bad as that, only"—

"Let me go on with it, aunt, now I have begun. Well, sir, he said they was black Papists—that's what he said. 'What's that?' said I. 'Why,' said he, 'they take their daughters and shut them up and torture them; and the gratings that look like coal-cellars are air-holes for them to breathe through, where they put them: and they wall them up alive if ever they try to get out. 'Lord o' mercy!' I said, 'it's a blessing there's only a boy at Freville Chase!' That was what we said. Well, sir, that wicked woman that did all the mischief, she was taken to wait on me in the nursery (we were in a villa at Sorrento), and

was regular nursery-maid under me when the dear child was older. Then three years afterwards, when she and I was taking him to England, and he died on the way, she said to me, 'You'll be hanged for murder as sure as possible, because they'll all say the people at Freville Chase bribed you to make away with him, who you know are worse than brute beasts with their children and have no regard to human life'—this is what she said, sir, grinning all the time. But, of course, I know better now, sir, and humbly beg your pardon I am sure, for repeating such things."

"Well—what did you do in consequence?"

"Well, sir, what could I do, alone among foreigners, as you may say, who didn't even know their own language when I spoke to them in it, and at her mercy who I knew would swear black was white when we returned to my lord. So then, when she brought the baby, a very beautiful child, I must say"—

"Thank you," said Everard. "I know the rest. Was the child who died dark or fair?"

"Fair sir, like his mother. He had blue eyes and flaxen curls."

"Are you quite sure about the eyes? Blue eyes in a young child, if they are not light blue, often become very dark afterwards."

"They were light blue sir: I can swear to that."

"When did you get the miniature copied?" said Everard suddenly, looking through her with an expression that said, "I know you did have it copied. You had better tell the truth."

The landlady looked surprised, but answered

quietly. "There was no copy taken, sir, that ever I heard of."

"I can make nothing out of her," thought Everard. "The other woman, who has a much stronger character, must have mesmerised her, or got the upper hand somehow.—Can you tell me?" he said, "where the Italian woman is?"

"Not just now, sir. She went off after she was examined by the lawyers: but she's coming back to see them again, because Mr. Hubert got my lord to promise her something for her trouble—in fact he gave her something for what she has done, though it was all against him."

"When she comes again, it will be worth your while to send her, and worth her while to come. Do you know who was the father of the child that you tell me was put in the place of Lord de Freville's nephew, who, as you say, died in Italy, on his way from Sorrento to Beynham?"

"No, sir. I questioned that woman over and over again about it; but she only blubbered and howled, and took on like a mad thing. I believe she would be glad to tell, if she knew. It's my belief she overreached herself and was taken in about it. But I should have said she is gone off to Italy on purpose to try and find out who the parents of the child were. Mr. Hubert told her it would be for her good to do that; and she's gone to do what she can. She'll be sure to come bothering to me when she comes back, and I'll let you know sir, directly, and send her here."

Everard again thanked them both, and delivered them over to the hospitality of Mrs. Roland, with a caution to keep their mouths closed, except for

gastronomic purposes, as long as any one besides herself was within earshot.

"I don't believe it any more than I did," he thought, "not a bit. I must get hold of the woman who said I was sucking the blood of the peoples. I made a mess of it by being too stiff with her. Still what could I have done? I wish I had called in Elfrida. She was right. She saw much further than I could. A sensible woman is always wiser in these things than any man."

He then began to review the whole story by the light, such as it was, that the landlady of the White Hart had thrown on it, and he summed up thus :

"It must be that the woman is too lymphatic to stand against the influence of a strong will. The other has, as it were, electro-biologised her into believing the story, by threatening to tell it without, on her own account, and get her into trouble. The lymphatic woman would be frightened out of her wits by that ; for she would have no witness to disprove it at this distance of time, and it would never occur to her that the *onus probandi* must rest with the person on whose unsupported evidence it depended. That must have been it. The landlady is just the sort of person to be a helpless tool. The longer it was delayed the more frightened she would be, and the more confused, after having been worked upon continually, year after year. Hubert is a Freville, I am sure of that—whatever people may say about accidental likenesses. The more I look at him and watch him, the more convinced I am of it ; and therefore he must be the one he has been supposed to be, there being no other. I must get

hold of the other woman who is sharp enough to know her own interest. The worst of it is that I shall have to wait for her, and, in the meantime, all sorts of complications"——

The door opened, and Hubert walked in. Everard looked up and read the purport of his arrival in his face.

"I see what you have come to tell," he said. "You have brought me bad news indeed, bad in every way, except as regards himself. But tell me how and when it was."

"He died this morning," said Hubert. "I have lost one who has been to me as a father. I come to announce it, and to give you a message from him. He died suddenly at last, only an hour after receiving holy communion. It was his wish to be buried here, in the little Catholic cemetery. He said, with the simplicity of a child, that he should feel more at home at Freville Chase, where the Frevilles had kept the faith, particularly as you were the means of his getting it at last. That was the first part of his message. His next request was that you should take the title and property at once, because any hesitation about it would only attract notice to what will otherwise be soon forgotten. He told me to say that the conclusion from the evidence was so unavoidable that he had been compelled to accept it. Moreover he charged me to see that his wishes in your regard are carried out at once. His third request was that you would build a Catholic church at Beynham as soon as possible ; and he wanted you to have it built in your own way, because he *believed* in your taste and knowledge."

"I am afraid he thought more of me than I deserve," said Everard. "But his last wishes will, of course, be law to me, except as regards believing in that ridiculous evidence. I wonder the lawyers didn't see through it; but I suppose they go by certain general rules that are right on the average, though not applicable to such an exceptional case as this. I have just seen the landlady of the White Hart, and though she gave her evidence in a manner that would have convinced nine people out of ten, I am not convinced. No sophistry or imposture of any kind whatever can succeed in convincing me you are not a Freville. Meanwhile, as I can't avoid assuming a false position, I must take its duties under protest. But I am interrupting you."

"No. That was all. But I was going to say that I have had a very kind letter from Sir Richard. I find you wrote to him. Do you happen to know whether I should find Father Merivale at home just now?"

"I don't think you could: but he is coming to dinner."

"That will do. The fact is, I want to be received into the Church, if possible, before I leave here to-morrow. I had some instructions from the priest who has been at Beynham most of the time lately; but he said that I was all right, owing to the books you gave me, which I had worked at pretty well. So I want to ask if I can be received before Mass to-morrow morning."

"I don't think there can be any difficulty about that; but we may as well go and ask how soon

he is likely to be back. I can go there with you and a little way outside the gatehouse. Ranston told me I could walk on the terrace before he left, and I feel the better for it. I am to ride, soon."

"Not Thunderbolt."

"Poor Thunderbolt!" said Everard in a dreamy voice, as if he were speaking of things far off. "That ride to Lyneham broke his heart. The pace was too sudden and I pressed him too much. He went gallantly, but the last fence finished him. I knew it had by the feel of him. He fell dead in his box a few days afterwards. We broke down together."

A shadow came over his face as he spoke, and his eyes looked wearily out of the western bay window at the hills, purpled by the setting sun, behind Bramscote, where Ida had told him how happy she was in him and through him, and where he had seen her as for the last time.

Hubert felt horribly tempted to wish that he had another chance at the Marquis Moncalvo, and an emphatic word was escaping between his teeth, when Everard rose from his chair and said:

"Come, I long for some fresh air. And I wanted to say something about the church at Beynham. You must bring me a sketch of the exact position of the ground; for, as you know, I can't go there, and the general effect of a building is more dependent on its position than people are now aware of. It should look as if it grew out of the landscape and completed it—not as if somebody had pitched it there hap-hazard, because *he had taken a fancy to it somewhere else.*

People choose what they call a model, or set somebody to compose one, without any reference to relative position, landscape, atmosphere, sunlight, climate, or height of ground. The design may be good in itself; but being carried out in the wrong place, *conclusio sequitur debiliorem partem*. There is no end to the money wasted and the good work spoilt by putting things in the wrong place. Hardly any one seems able in these days to understand, still less to foresee, either the relations between the style of a thing and the surroundings, or the effect of the parts on the whole. They get one man to design a church, another to decorate the inside on no plan at all and irrespective of the architect's idea, a pious lady to present a statue from Munich, and another pious lady to cover the pedestal on feast days with bits of blue silk or satin that look like one of her old petticoats."

"I have seen a specimen of the kind at Otterbury," said Hubert, "where you went to Mass when you were at Beynham."

"That isn't quite what I mean. That little church, which has the appearance of a cast-off schoolroom, is very poor, like the congregation, and tells its own tale. There is a certain pathos in the poor little attempts to relieve its bareness. But I do protest against cramming a church with expensive rubbish, and being satisfied with gross violations of the commonest good taste, such as would not be tolerated in a drawing-room. Catholics in England are too few, too poor, and too overwhelmed by claims of all kinds, to do anything worth speaking of in the way of church-

building. We can only point to the Cathedrals and the ruined Abbeys, and the old parish churches, and say *Fuimus Troes*. But we are not obliged to ignore the commonest principles of good taste, and distract or impede devotion by making hideous contrasts of shape and colour, and insist on putting up statues that suggest the idea of a hairdresser's window, and then dress them out in odds and ends of muslin and tinsel, like dolls at a fancy bazaar. I have often been stared at as a heathen and a publican for not admiring these atrocities, and had it implied, more or less broadly, that I was wanting in devotion. I astonished a pious lady once about the bedizened statues by quoting St. John of the Cross, where he speaks of '*people who adorn the sacred images with those garments which a frivolous race daily invents*,' and I showed her the passage in his works; but she only said she wasn't clever enough to understand him, and wouldn't presume, &c. . . . So there it ended—and here we are at Father Merivale's door. And there he is, but with somebody. If we walk about for a few minutes the coast will be clear. I was going to say that I have high authority enough for disliking bad taste and frippery in churches. Look at the devotional dignity of St. Chad's Cathedral in Birmingham. I defy you to find a bit of bad or doubtful taste in it. Go into the Dominican Church at Stone, built by that holy and in every respect wonderful woman, Mother Margaret. Go there some day, and, if I am alive, tell me your impressions of it. She never would tolerate frippery or any kind of bad taste."

"I can well imagine that:" said Hubert. "A separation of the good and the beautiful is a kind of divorce. I don't mean to compare it with that which Moses permitted '*because of the hardness of men's hearts*;' but it certainly shows a want of something that ought to be. How do you account for the artistic theories of these pious people?"

"I don't think they have any. They go by rule of thumb, implying the blunderbuss principle, that out of many scattered shots one or two ought to hit in the dark."

"How comes it that so many people are satisfied with the results, when Catholic traditions of art point exactly the other way?"

"It comes down from the later days of persecution, when Catholics in England were just beginning to build wretched little chapels by sufferance. They were obliged to make them look like stables or tool-houses, and were contented with bare walls inside; for it was unsafe to attract attention. So deep was their impression of the necessity, that the precaution outlasted the need. There are people now living who remember the time when there wasn't a statue of our Blessed Lady to be found in any one of them. By and by they began to do something; but the old traditions had been taken from them, and what they could afford to do was shockingly bad, of course—mahogany and tinsel. They couldn't help that. Then there came an influx of converts. They did good in many ways, and all the ways led towards a revival of taste. First of all, they had not inherited the habit of taking it for granted that they were aliens in their native land. That in itself was something

to begin with, for no one who has not tried the other position can imagine what a cold shade it casts around one, even now, when things have changed a good deal in fact and more in appearance. They infused new blood and fresh enthusiasm, and a readiness for warfare both offensive and defensive. Their influence helped a good deal to stir people up in many ways ; and as just then there was a strong revival of Gothic art, with Pugin at its head, everything looked well in that direction. But the Catholic movement (as the phrase goes) relaxed, Pugin died, schools and poor missions multiplied their claims, and revived mediævalism went where the wealth of the country was. So far it could not be helped. You can't do great works on a grand scale unless the purse and the feeling of the nation are with you. But what we do we can at least try to do well. We needn't strain our resources in cultivating bad taste and making pretentious incongruities, when a little more thought and a little less self-confidence would help us to something good of its kind at less cost. Suppose an artist were painting a picture for you—what would anyone say, if you insisted on spoiling the composition by setting somebody else to paint the background and two or three others to do some irrelevant figures out of drawing? Yet people often do the same thing in principle. They decorate a church without regard to the style of the building or the intention of the architect, add anything that somebody will pay for, and think one has no devotion if one doesn't admire it."


"It seems to me that you are letting off the

converts rather too easily," said Hubert, as they passed the gatehouse and turned into the Chase. "What was the use of them if they couldn't make a row about church art, when they came in fresh—unfettered by traditional repression, and had Pugin to teach them the right principles."

"And by the same token," said Everard, "they were likely to fall into the idea that it was a test of orthodoxy to go in for what was most conspicuous. Converts are no worse in taste on the average than the rest, and no better. The cause lies partly in the disheartening disproportion between wants and means, partly in the modern idea that everyone can judge everything *stans pede in uno*. We know what humility means in a spiritual sense, but we are too much in a hurry now to apply it in things that have no apparent connection with the confessional—in things that don't make a direct appeal to the conscience. Humility shows us our own deficiencies, and makes us look upwards with critical reverence to the highest models. That it sharpens perception in spiritual matters every Catholic knows, who knows anything; and as the spiritual is the true foundation of the intellectual and the artistic, the same cause will produce the same effect in the one case as in the other. But the difference is, that outside the spiritual we don't see so clearly either the bearings of things or our own motives. No kind of self-deception comes more readily to hand than that of depreciating one's own judgment while one is really searching no higher. We shall all, or at anyrate most of us, find it somewhere in ourselves. And now the obvious retort is, 'What

are *you* going to do, after criticising others?' I can only answer that I feel very small, and hope to do my best. I have gone on from one thing to another, being set off by the responsibility of building a church at the command of the dead ; and I have run one thing into the other without much connection. We can work out what I mean some of these days, and make something of it, perhaps. But here is the man you want, close upon us. Father Merivale, you are wanted on urgent private business—and so I will be off."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

IX days afterwards the mortal remains of the fourteenth Lord de Freville were brought to Freville Chase and buried in the cemetery behind the grove of walnut-trees on the south-west of the house. Dr. Ranston had arrived the evening before to see Everard, and six priests came in the morning to sing the requiem. In the afternoon, when the last of them had gone away, Dr. Ranston, who was walking on the terrace with Everard, began to be enthusiastic about the requiem and Father Merivale's brief address.

"It was extraordinarily impressive," he said. "But I think we had better go in. You have had no rest all day."

Hubert, who had speeded the last parting guest on his way to the station, met them at the entrance and they went into the gallery.

"Yes, it was wonderfully impressive," said the doctor, seating himself and turning over a few leaves of the nearest book. "That old plain chant was a poem in music, a grand and wonderful poem, that suggested even more than it expressed, and took one back to the days of Tintern and Croyland. Father Merivale said just what one felt to be the right thing in the right place.

His words were solemn without sadness, comforting without the spiritual optimism that turns an ordinary sinner into a saint by the mere fact of his having died. Your priests know how far they may go; and that gives them a freedom of thought such as I see nowhere else. Religiously minded Protestants go to work stiffly, as if they were pinioned. The broad school has no restraint at all. I find order and freedom united in the Catholic Church and nowhere else."

"Yes; and there's a lot more that you won't find anywhere else, nor anything like it," said Hubert. "There's the truth, whole and entire. That's why priests have the freedom you speak of. A man may break down fences, as you say, and cut about the country like a colt that has got out of the stable; but he isn't really free in his movements unless he is sure of his ground. He must either shy at this thing or that, or get into bogs or rabbit-holes. I saw that; so I looked out for a safe lead, and now I know where I am."

"There is a great deal in what you say," answered Dr. Ranston, "and if I could be as sure of a lead as you think you are, I should follow it. But I can't find it. You are fortunate in feeling sure that you have."

"Not if it isn't the right one."

"Well, even then. A happy dream is a subjective reality while it lasts. I was not aware that you had become a Catholic. I heard that Lord de Freville had."

"Yes. I'm going to make my first communion to-morrow in this chapel. Less than six months

ago I believed like you, that one can be an honorary member of the Catholic Church."

"My dear enthusiastic young friend," said the doctor in a tone of strongly repressed irritation, "I never said nor supposed anything of the kind."

"And yet it comes to that, if you think of it," said Hubert, with a good-humoured simplicity that was irresistible. "You admire the beauty that you see in the Catholic Church: you reverence the holiness of her principles: you look up to the heroic that you find in her teaching, and in the lives of her saints, and in the life of one who, living in the world, with every trial and temptation that the world could set before him, has done things that astonished your mind and made you wonder how they could have been done. While under that impression you saw the last sacraments administered to him in Rome, and you were present at the Requiem Mass to-day. You spoke more enthusiastically of both than I ever heard a Catholic speak, and yet you tell me that the thing which makes both what they are is only a comfortable sort of dream, better than being bothered when one is awake. If that isn't trying to be an honorary member of the Catholic Church, I don't know what is. An honorary member of a club doesn't pay, and hasn't any responsibilities; and an æsthetic admirer of Catholicity thinks he has nothing to do but to enjoy what pleases him in it, without going to confession (which human nature, as such, isn't inclined to like), or binding himself to obey anything beyond his own private appreciation of what is agreeable to him. The only difference between the two is, that it can't be

done in the Church. I am afraid you think me an impudent fellow, and self-sufficient, for expressing myself in this way to a man so very much above me in experience, and knowledge, and ability, and everything else; but nothing could have been further from my intention than that, or more against my principles, and more particularly and for every reason as regards yourself. In a question of religion one must speak openly or not at all; and I couldn't have done so without putting the case as I did, for I could see it in no other light."

"I like your way of putting it," said Dr. Ranston. "I was a little startled at the picture, seeing it for the first time in that light; but I must say that I find it a faithful one. I acknowledge myself as a would-be honorary member, ignored of course as such, but unable to wish for more. I can't believe in the Catholic Church because—but I have no right to ventilate my disbelief before two fervent Catholics."

"Don't mind about that" said Hubert. "The draught won't hurt us. But I must leave you to Everard, for I find it's a good deal past four o'clock now, and I promised to take a message for Father Merivale to an old man at Chase End this afternoon. So I must be off, or I shall not have time to do it."

"Well, then," said Dr. Ranston, when Hubert had left the room, "I can't believe in the Catholic Church, because I find it too complete for a world that is essentially incomplete—too perfect for a state of things in which perfection is unattainable—too uncompromising to be reconciled with the idea that God adapted it for a condition of society that would

fall into chaos without habitual compromises—claiming to be incorruptible in a world where every living thing has the seeds of corruption within it.”

“I think you will find some weak points there,” said Everard. “If she were not complete and perfect in principle, how could she be the work of God? If she were not uncompromising in doctrine, how could she claim to be the teacher of truth, which is necessarily exclusive? If she were not incorruptible, how could she be for all time? St. Ignatius, who lived in the second century, says in one of his epistles (to the Ephesians, I think), ‘*For this cause did the Lord take the ointment on His head, that He might breathe incorruption upon the Church.*’ The attributes you speak of, instead of being a reasonable cause for doubting her divine origin, would lead one to infer the contrary. Of course I don’t expect you to infer it as a fact; for if you did, you would be obliged to accept the consequences, which you are not prepared to do. But, at any rate, you must see that, whatever the inference may be worth in your opinion, it proves against you, if it proves anything.”

“I see that I have no chance against you,” said Dr. Ranston with a self-depreciatory smile. It was the smile of a man who feels that his cause is not equal to his powers of mind, and unconsciously tries to maintain the dignity of both by exaggerating his adversary’s means of defence on the point in question. Everard saw the smile, its meaning, its tendency, and said :

“Did you notice the sunset to-day? I never saw a finer one.”

"Yes, I did," answered the doctor. "But why do you turn the conversation?"

"Because I thought it was leading nowhere."

"You think there is no earnestness in me then?"

"How could I think so, after all that I have seen of you, and all that you have done for me? You are full of earnestness; but, in the matter of religion, it boils over and goes off in steam."

"I know it does. And my feeling of what your cousin Mr. Freville calls honorary membership is the safety-valve that keeps the boiler from bursting. Without it I should have no faith at all."

"I don't see how you can be said to have any, even in the loosest sense; for faith is necessarily definite, and your belief is not."

"As definite as yours, only broader."

"Is the true course of a stream broader because it overflows, or definite because its banks are broken in? My dear friend, this is leading nowhere."

"Nowhere? You have made a curious philosophical discovery."

"Well, to be more correct, it doesn't lead anywhere. It must go or tumble somewhere of course, but only into a quagmire or a labyrinth without a clue."

"Why? My theory may be false, but the idea is intelligible, and may be worked out."

"I don't know how, for you start with an impossibility."

"How do you make that out?"

"Well, you have what are called 'Catholic sympathies'?"

"Yes, that is just what I have."

"With it as a whole, doctrine, principles, and ritual, or only with candlesticks, and thuribles, and plain chant?"

"As a whole. I can't separate the two in my mind, any more than I can separate the tracery of a Gothic arch from the arch itself."

"Very well, then. As your sympathies are with the whole, so they are with its parts, and therefore with its doctrine, which is the principal part—the arch out of which the tracery comes. But Catholic doctrine is in direct contradiction to Protestant doctrine, which you profess. Now the possibility of being true is the least claim that a doctrine can have to the sympathy of any one, for no sane person would care about a doctrine that he knew to be false. Therefore you must believe that Catholic doctrine may possibly be true; and as you also believe that Protestant doctrine is true, it follows that two contradictories are both true, which is impossible. Therefore you start from an impossibility."

"We are at cross purposes. To me it isn't a question of which is certainly true, but of which is the most probable; and the Catholic faith is, to my mind, the least probable of the two, though far more attractive."

"Yes; but that only amounts to being of opinion that the one is not so likely to be false as the other. What can you work out from that? Both propositions are negative. Out of negative premises you can't conclude anything."

"When I said 'the most probable,' I meant to say 'certain,' as far as I am capable of feeling certain about it."

"Subjectively true, then; true in your own belief. That isn't what you said before, by the by, and it changes your position, but without mending it, for Catholicity and Protestantism can't both be even subjectively true, or you would still be believing in two contradictories. Neither can the one that is not so seem even probable; for, if it were, the other would not be subjectively true, but only more probable, which is what you said it was at first. Therefore, whether you find Protestantism more probable, as you began by saying, or subjectively true, as you say now, your Catholic sympathies are out of place, and your idea of what Hubert called honorary membership a delusion. The idea is not new. My own limited experience has shown it to be the natural outcome of seeking truth with a reservation, and hero-worshipping the good and the beautiful, till the true, the good, and the beautiful are erected into an impersonal God, a Trinity in the abstract. That is the logical result of it; for, whatever you may think, you can't be subjectively certain that Protestantism is true, or you would never dream of attributing any probability at all to that which contradicts it. So we come to what you said at first—a question of more or less probability; and if you follow that out, you will come to an impersonal God—in fact, to 'the Unknown and Unknowable,' which puts a stop to any further knowledge; and as regards the question you started, leads nowhere—which is just what I began by saying."

"I am not up to finding a hole in your argument," said Dr. Ranston, "at anyrate not without cudgelling my brains and keeping you waiting for the result. Suppose we try a different tack."

"If you wish it," said Everard; "but I think you had better give up the voyage. You are not prepared to undertake it."

"I believe you are right. Suppose, then, we see what I can infer of the whole Catholic faith from a few of its doctrines. The whole is made up of its parts, and if I can go through them all by degrees, I may see at last what the whole is."

"If you wish it to be so, why, so let it be," said Everard. "I know that people *have* found the truth in that way. But it isn't a safe one, unless it leads up to belief in the whole as a whole, and in the parts because they are parts of that whole; for otherwise, if they miss one part at first, and don't quite make it out when they find it, they are liable to doubt the authenticity of the whole. However, I don't think it matters in your case. You don't want authenticity: you want information about things that you have not had the means of inquiring into. I can give you very little, for I know much less than you suppose; but what little I can give is at your service, as everything of mine will always be."

"You are always kind and always considerate," said Dr. Ranston. "I feel that I have no right to force these subjects on you, having, as you say, no final cause for doing so. But I have one excuse. I often hear people talk nonsense about

Catholic doctrines, and, as I have a great reverence for the Catholic Church, and believe in Macaulay's New Zealander on a broken arch of London Bridge, I should be glad of any information that would help me to turn them over. The first question that occurs to me is that of Transubstantiation. As to its being impossible, which is the common argument against it, the objection is contemptible. Our own food undergoes transubstantiation continually, under the name of assimilation; and as that is possible, being true, it really is too cool of any one, calling himself a Christian, to maintain that God cannot transubstantiate bread and wine into His own body and blood—cannot do at once, by a miracle, what He is always doing gradually by one of His natural laws. The impossibility of multiplying His presence is just as untenable by a Christian, for He who multiplied the loaves and fishes can certainly multiply His own body. All these objections are absurd—inconsistent with a Christian's belief and knowledge. There is no intellectual difficulty in it. Mine, were I inquiring as a possible convert, would be one of feeling and impression. My difficulty is past reasoning. The stupendous condescension, the sublime humility of the act overwhelms me. It is beyond me: I can't take it in. And as I don't find myself less capable of understanding what comes in my way than other people are, I can't believe that God can have so ordained, as He never requires from us more than we can do."

"I must remind you," answered Everard, "that the difficulty is not original, and not founded on

the deficiencies of human understanding. Many of the Jews, after seeing and hearing our Lord, left Him on account of that doctrine, and said, 'Who can hear it?' A small number of them remained, and St. Peter, speaking in their name, said, when asked if they would do the same, 'Lord, whither shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' If our Lord has the words of eternal life (and we must believe that He has, if we believe the New Testament), surely we had better believe His words than trust to our own attempts at grasping the Infinite and exhausting the Inexhaustible. Those people were without excuse, for God Himself had spoken to them in bodily presence, as He now speaks to others by His grace; but there is the same fallacy in your reasoning as in theirs. There are two middle terms, as there are nearly always in the objections raised against Catholic doctrines. But I wish you would talk of something else. The people you want to set right will go on saying the same things, whether you correct them or not; and you may do harm to yourself. A wall without mortar is easily blown down, but one can't build on the sand. You are not prepared to face all consequences; and if you should happen to see beyond, and turn away from the sight, you will be in the position of those Jews. One thing leads on to another, and if we go on, you may be taken off your legs without having learned to swim."

"Don't be afraid," said Dr. Ranston. "I know what I am about. Where are the two middle terms?"

"They are as distinct as the two funnels of a

big steamer. Your major is, that no one can believe what he can't understand; your minor, that *you* can't understand transubstantiation. But in order to conclude that you therefore cannot believe it, the word 'understand' must have the same meaning in both premises. Now it has not. You can't mean that no one can believe what he doesn't understand *thoroughly*; or half the world would have to disbelieve the best authenticated facts of every science. Therefore you can only mean, 'understand *to a certain extent*.' But you can't mean that you don't understand transubstantiation to a certain extent, especially after what you have said about it. You can only mean that you don't understand it thoroughly. And so your argument really comes to this: 'No one can believe what he can't understand to a certain extent. I don't understand transubstantiation thoroughly. Therefore I can't believe it.'

"Bother your logic!" said the doctor. "My intellectual work has been experimental, and my recreation either art or the classics or a surface-view of other people's ideas. I have had no time to examine them. Give me something to tell the people when they irritate me by their platitudes."

"I think you might ask them then whether our Lord, when He said, 'This *is* My Body,' and 'This *is* My Blood,' meant what He said or not; reminding them firstly that the word '*is*' cannot have been used for '*represents*,' in default of a proper word, since, as Cardinal Wiseman has shown, there are more than forty words for it in Syriac—and secondly that any doubt as to the truth of our

Lord's words must involve a doubt of His divinity. What they would say I don't know; but the question is an awkward one for a man who is not prepared to accept either the plain meaning of the words or the consequences of rejecting it. You might go on to say that our Lord, when He told the Apostles to do in remembrance of Him what He had just done, must have meant it to be done with the same effect—otherwise we must suppose either that He told them to do what He never meant them to do, or that when they repeated His words and action, the bread and wine became their own body and blood. Then you might ask them what our Lord meant by saying, 'Behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world,' if He intended that this and other powers given by Him to the Apostles should die with them. You may say all that, and a great deal more, just as self-evident, and, when you have said it, your hearers will repeat the same objections in the same way to the next comer. Argument, however conclusive it may be, is useless if the hearer's mind is shut against it."

The doctor winced at this indirect hit, but he only said :

"Thank you; I shall make use of that. I should like to go into a few more things. The infallibility would be no stumbling-block to me, if I could believe that the Catholic Church was founded by our Lord, on St. Peter, to last till the end of the world. It would be a necessary consequence: therefore I can defend it from that point of view. But I should like to hear what you have

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to say about it. I can't see that it implies any more restraint than all authority does. All teaching implies a quasi-infallibility in the sources of it, and resolves itself, when necessary, into that of the head teacher. Therefore, assuming that the Pope and the bishops are in the place of St. Peter and the Apostles, who were taught and inspired by God incarnate, it follows that the Pope, representing St. Peter, to whom our Lord clearly gave the headship of His Church, must be absolutely infallible when he speaks, *ex cathedrâ*, on faith or morals. From the Catholic standpoint I can't see how any other conclusion can be arrived at. As to its being new, they might as well have said that the Catholic Church didn't believe in the existence of God till the Council of the Vatican defined it. It has always been notorious that Catholics believed in the Pope's infallibility. All the old Protestant books of controversy throw it in their faces. It's downright humbug to call it new, and nonsense to deny its being an unavoidable consequence of believing that the Pope is the successor of St. Peter and the Bishops are the successors of the Apostles. All depends on believing that—but then I don't."

Here the doctor made an emphatic pause, as if waiting for some notice of the final statement. Everard looked and laughed, and looked again half seriously.

"Wouldn't a W be better," he said, "than a D, to make the word tell the precise truth, as I am sure you would wish it to do?"

"Come, now—your Church doesn't tell you to judge others."

"I am not judging, and I don't want an answer. The answer must be from you to yourself. If you are sure of your motives, well and good; but I have not found myself so invariably sure of my own."

"Ah! well—we must do our best. We know very little of anything. Won't you say something about the infallibility, after my stout defence of it from your own point of view?"

"What sort of thing do you want me to say? I am not a theologian, as you know. All I can think of at this moment is, that it gives freedom of thought by showing where rocks and shoals are. You can't (unless you are reckless) steer boldly on the open sea of inquiry, if you haven't a chart and a compass. The chart in this case is the constant and universal tradition of the Church. The compass is the divine light that enables the Vicar of Christ to guide St. Peter's bark by a power not his own."

"True, most true, remarkably true," said the doctor, "assuming that the Catholic Church was founded by our Saviour."

"Have you any reason to give for denying it?" said Everard. "I shouldn't have asked you the question but for the challenge."

"Well, I can't see any need or any probability of a visible Church. I don't believe that God would require us to see what so many true believers in God can't see."

"If that reason is valid, the Jews were not required to believe in the divinity of our Lord; for they were true believers in God—the only true believers in Him, and though our Lord was pre-

sent among them, His divinity was veiled. Are you prepared to say they were not required to believe in Him?"

"Of course I am not. But I don't see that the cases are the same. The Jews had witnessed His miracles."

"Yes, but they persuaded themselves that He worked them through Beelzebub, just as people persuade themselves now that the power and unity and permanence of the Catholic Church can be accounted for by 'wonderful organisation.' The cases are precisely the same, from the point of view that you take. If your reasoning is valid for yourself, valid it must be for the Jews. I say nothing about the question involved in the one case or in the other. I say that your reason won't do, and I defy you to prove that it will."

"I tell you what," said Dr. Ranston. "I must get up an answer. I can't keep pace with you in answering."

"Very well. But all this is leading nowhere, as I said before. If you want to do any good to the people who irritate you by putting your own opinions before you in an unpleasant light"—

"You certainly have a way of taking the dignity out of one's opinions, and making one almost grateful for it by that smile of yours. But what do you want me to do?"

"To see whether your polemical friend is a Christian at all, to begin with, and try to make him one if he is not. Many people now go in the category as Christians who don't really believe in the incarnation. Are you quite sure that you do yourself?"

"What will you ask me next? Of course I do. The state of society under the great Pagan Empire was so hopeless that there is only one way of accounting for what was founded out of it; and that is, the life and death of the God-Man, and the spirit He infused through His apostles into the world."

"A very strong inference to put before an intelligent heathen, but hardly what would occur to a Christian as his reason for being one. It hasn't the true ring about it."

"Hasn't it? I am curious to know why you think so, and what you suppose to be the reason of it."

"I think so because the *causa efficiens* of belief in Christian doctrines is faith. History may help you to it, and so will many other things; but when you have it, you don't account to yourself in that way for having it, because in fact you did not have it in that way, though you may have been so led up to it. As to yourself—don't ask me. There is no good to be done by it."

"But I must know why there is not, in your opinion, the 'true ring' about the reason I gave."

"Well, if you *will* have an answer, I must give one; but I do so under protest, for I fear that you will run the risk of knowing more than you are prepared to profit by."

"Leave that to my own conscience. I want an answer."

"Then I must first ask you this question: Do you believe the Blessed Virgin to be the mother of God?"

"The mother of our Saviour, of course."

"And is He, or is He not, God?"

"Yes: but when He came on earth He came as a man. She was the mother of the man, not of God"——

"And did He cease to be God by becoming incarnate?"

"Why of course He was God in Heaven, but she had nothing to do with His Divinity."

"Then His Divinity had nothing to do with His manhood. The one proposition is a necessary consequence of the other. There could be no hypostatic union."

"Well, call it what you like, I can't see how there could be any union of the Divine and the human."

"I thought so. Then, in point of fact, you don't believe in the Incarnation, but in your own idea of it; and that idea is Nestorianism. The conclusion is inevitable. If the Blessed Virgin is not the mother of God, as the third Council of Ephesus proclaimed her to be, in answer to the Nestorians (who said, like you, that the nature of man was not united with the nature of God in the person of our Lord), our Lord while on earth must have been simply a perfect man, a sort of emanation from the Second Person of the Trinity, having a certain amount of divine power, not His own, but delegated to Him. This is the sort of thing we come to, if we stumble at the threshold of Christianity by not realising the true position and character of the blessed Virgin who brought the Saviour into the world. St. Eucherius says, '*If you would know how great is the mother, think how great is the Son;*' and if, as I have said, we do not realise the true position

and dignity of the mother, we lose sight either of the Godhead or of the humanity of the Son. The Gnostics did the one, the Ebionites the other. One or other we must do, to be consistent, if we deny that she is the mother of God."

"Well, but granted, for the sake of argument that she is"—

"No, thank you. That would imply your being able to answer what I have said. If you can, do so."

"Well, suppose we take it as proved by default. Granted, then, that the title 'Mother of God' is founded on a true idea of facts, how can her being the mother of God prove the Immaculate Conception?"

"First of all, let me ask you what you understand by the term?"

"I suppose it to mean that the cause of her birth was miraculous, not in the usual way."

"Why that was the heresy of the Collyridians in the fourth century, who were answered by St. Epiphanius. Don't you see that it would make her a goddess and (if one may say so without irreverence) add a fourth person to the Blessed Trinity. These odd notions about the meaning of the Immaculate Conception are not new to me. I have heard some very curious things said on various Catholic doctrines, and heard of still stranger notions. Once on board an ocean steamer, a man who was talking against the infallibility, said: 'Do you mean to tell me that, if I were to fire a pistol at the Pope, the bullet wouldn't go through him?' People laughed; but really his definition was not further from the fact than the revived Collyridianism that you, a man of powerful

and cultivated intellect, have supposed the Church to be capable of putting forth."

"I admit it," said Dr. Ranston. "I was talking of what I didn't understand, and forgetting the scientific accuracy of your theologians. Now, what *does* it mean?"

"The facts will explain themselves. Eve was free from sin at her creation, wasn't she? and ceased to be so at the Fall, which entailed original sin on the human race. The blessed Virgin, by explicitly consenting to be the mother of the Redeemer, saying, '*Be it unto me according to Thy word,*' became of her own free will the instrument of the redemption, as Eve by consenting to the words of the tempter became the instrument of the Fall. Is it so? or is it not?"

"I never thought of it in that light before; but there is no denying the fact."

"Well, then, as Eve, the voluntary instrument of the Fall and the mother of the human race, was created innocent, free from sin, in fact immaculate—don't be afraid of the word, but look at its derivation (the Fathers use it as speaking of the immaculate earth out of which Adam was formed)—is it likely that the blessed Virgin, the voluntary instrument of the redemption, the mother of the Incarnate God, would have been conceived with the taint of original sin in her?"

"I don't think it is: but original sin altogether is a puzzle to me. It seems like forcing sin on people."

"How do you make that out? If a man is naturally idle, is idleness forced on him? Hasn't he a will to resist it with? But we are going from the point. You have admitted the improba-

bility of her being conceived in original sin, and the Church teaches that in fact she was not. The Immaculate Conception simply means that by the merits of her Divine Son she was preserved beforehand from incurring the stain of original sin. It was not removed at or before her birth; it was never permitted to be in her. The dogma is a necessary consequence of her being the mother of God, which the third Council of Ephesus, proclaiming the faith and traditions of the Church against the Nestorians, defined her to be. You will find, that in the oldest of the Eastern liturgies, which is ascribed to St. James—I am quoting roughly from memory out of the Bishop of Birmingham's remarkable book on the Immaculate Conception—she is called, '*Our most holy, immaculate, and most glorious Lady, Mother of God, and ever Virgin Mary.*'"

"There is a wonderful consistency in it all," said Dr. Ranston, "rather too much. The parts fit together too well. The Gospels, as Paley (I think) remarks in his Evidences, lead one to infer their truthfulness from the fact that their statements don't all fit in so exactly."

Everard said nothing, but looked at him as before.

"What is that provoking smile for now?" asked the doctor.

"I was only wondering," answered Everard.

"What at? You can't deny the fact; and I don't see how you can dispute the inference."

"I am not going to deny the fact or dispute the inference; but I deny their having anything to do with the character of my argument about the

Immaculate Conception. The discrepancies you find in the Gospels are only small variations that don't affect the nature of the facts related—as, for instance, in the case of St. Peter denying our Lord. It matters not whether he denied Him once before the cock crew, or thrice before the cock had crowed twice. The essence of it is that he did deny Him, and that his denial was marked by the crowing of a cock, as our Lord had predicted. You are confusing records of facts with arguments drawn from a comparison of facts; and because little unimportant discrepancies in the narration of facts by different people are a sign of truthfulness, rather than the reverse, you think that inconsistency, or, in other words, illogical reasoning is an essential condition of trustworthiness in putting together the evidences about a dogma. Don't you see the two middle terms, *par nobile fratrum*, staring at you? The upshot of your objection is that we ought not to be logical about religion. The idea has grown up in England since the Reformation, and flourishes in its own way among that large but diminishing number of people who, while they take it for granted that to be a Catholic is out of the question, have an instinctive dread of the infidelity which they feel lurking in the dark at the end of their own principles, and have no alternative but that of shutting their eyes and making an exceptional law against logic."

"But we are told we must bend our reason as regards spiritual things," said the doctor.

"As you understand it, no. We are told to bend our reason in obedience to faith—that is to

what is above reason and beyond its range: and the Apostle St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, defines faith to be 'the evidence of things that appear not,' or, in the Protestant version, 'things unseen.' But we are not told to bend our reason in obedience to nonsense—to illogical arguments, which are below reason. For instance, the dogma of the Trinity is beyond the range of human intellect, yet not contrary to reason, for, as the penny catechism reminds us, we can recognise a Trinity in the three powers of our own soul—Memory, Understanding, and Will. Now in the principle that logic ought to be kept out of religion there is neither reason nor faith. True faith is not afraid of true reasoning: it is not afraid of arguments logical or illogical; for God infuses faith into the soul, and no one can steal from us a gift of God except through our own fault. Right reason, knowing its own sphere, keeps to its own work. Don't you see that faith shows us the necessary object of belief, while reason teaches us to express it, or defend its truth when attacked?"

"Yes, but the difficulty is to know where faith ends and speculative aspirations begin."

"There can be no question about that. They are sometimes precursors of faith, but they never can follow it, because faith is fixed and speculation implies uncertainty. Where they seem to do so, you will find that what seems to be faith is really nothing more than opinion stimulated by desire."

A shadow came over the doctor's face.

"Why do you try to spirit away my faith and

father it on a wish?" he said in a melancholy voice.

"God forbid!" answered Everard. "It was the fear of disturbing your mind to no good purpose that made me so shy of answering you. That was what I really meant by 'leading nowhere.'"

"Never mind! One *must* be disturbed sometimes, if one tries to do one's best."

"One can't do more than that," said Everard; "but I find the measurement in myself liable to mistakes."

"Yes, of course. Human judgment must often be erroneous. But we were speaking of the Immaculate Conception. I have no sort of prejudice against it—quite the contrary. But isn't it a modern idea? I ask for information. People say that it is."

"They do, on the curious hypothesis that defining a truth is inventing a lie. We had that before, about the Infallibility; and you made a very just remark about it. I have a book in the house on the Immaculate Conception, if Hubert has brought it back, that will tell you what you want to know. I have already mentioned it. It was written some years ago by the Bishop of Birmingham, and is in one small volume. It has been translated into many languages. You won't lay it down oftener than you can help if you once begin it. Speaking of what the Fathers wrote on the subject, he says (I am quoting as well as I can from memory), that they rivalled each other in drawing out the resemblance and the contrast between Eve and the blessed Virgin—that they

compare the original innocence of the one with that of the other, and show that our Lord was born of a mother free from the curse of original sin, as Adam was formed out of the virginal and as yet immaculate earth. Among those who made this comparison between Eve and the blessed Virgin were St. Justin Martyr, who was born at the beginning of the second century, and St. Irenæus, a disciple of St. Polycarp, the disciple of St. John the Apostle. Compare their comparison with these words in the Cantic of Canticles (Song of Solomon, as your version, I think, calls it), '*Thou art all fair, O my love, and there is not a spot in thee. . . . Under the apple tree I raised thee up—there was thy mother corrupted. . . . My spouse is as an enclosed garden, and a sealed fountain.*' Now, I ask you first, whether, comparing the third chapter of Genesis with the first chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, those words are applicable to the blessed Virgin or not."

"Clearly they are. They couldn't apply to Solomon's wife, nor to any woman but one. If not, they are a mere collection of poetical images with no foundation in fact—which would imply that they were not inspired, and their wonderful applicability would then be accidental—which would be harder to believe than their obvious meaning."

"Do they," said Everard, "point to the resemblance and the contrast which the Fathers have rivalled each other in drawing out, as Bishop Ullathorne shows?"

"They do distinctly."

"Would the words, '*There is no spot (or stain) in thee,*' be applicable to the blessed Virgin, if she

was born in original sin? Baptism cleanses us from the sin, '*sed infirmitas manet*,' as the Roman catechism tells us, quoting from St. Augustine. Could it be said of any one not free from original and actual sin, '*There is no spot in thee?*' It sounds even stronger in the Vulgate—'*Macula non est in te*'—and if you prefer the Greek as less Popish, the Septuagint says, *μῶμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν σοί*. Does this point to the Immaculate Conception or not? and is it old enough for you?"

"Yes, it is. You have given me a great deal of valuable information, and suggested still more."

"And yet," said Everard, "the discussion, as I predicted at the outset, has led nowhere."

Dr. Ranston made a vague gesture of dissent, but said nothing, and appeared relieved, rather than disappointed, when he saw Hubert, who had just returned from Chase End, come into the room, carrying a bundle of papers.

"I see there is some business for you," he said, preparing to leave the room.

"Wait a moment," said Everard. "What is it?"

Hubert put the papers into his hand, saying:

"The evidence. I brought it with me last night, and have just taken it out of my bag. I couldn't get it from the lawyers before."

"Do stay then," said Everard to the doctor. "I want your opinion about this. I have had his rights thrust upon me—you know the circumstances. Now I am sure there is a lie somewhere, and I am determined to find it out. This is the evidence. Perhaps it may give me a hint what to be at. I should be glad of your help."

"I feel sure you will be convinced by it," said Hubert, "as every one"—

"Whatever you may think, don't oppose anything he may wish to do about it," whispered Dr. Ranston, while he was picking up a book that he had taken up and dropped on purpose. "I see that the interest he takes in it is the only thing that keeps him going—the one thing that may prolong his life."

"The thing is incredible on the face of it," said Everard. "My brother Hubert Freville died at Alassio, and, if these women are to be believed, the other Hubert Freville died at the same place and about the same time. Nobody shall make me believe that two Hubert Frevilles of the same age died at the same time and place, one coming from England and the other going there. In that they have betrayed themselves. They should have pretended the child died somewhere else. But then, nowhere else along the road would have been so convenient for their purpose."

"It was a curious coincidence," said Dr. Ranston—"two distant relations coming and going along the Corniche Road at the same time—and odd that they should both have been called Hubert."

"My brother was named Hubert, as one may say, accidentally," said Everard. "His mother, who died soon after he was born, in consequence of the shock occasioned by my father's sudden death, had only strength to say that she wished her brother to be his guardian. She was unable to speak when they asked her what name he was to have. Mrs. Roland, knowing that 'Hubert' was

a family name and the name of my grandfather, proposed it, and no one objected. So that was the name he was given. Now then, who shall read this precious document? Will you?"

Dr. Ranston began to read out the evidence. It was substantially the same as that which Hubert had extracted from the two women, but with two additions. There was corroborative evidence about the colour of the eyes and hair, and there was a statement by Hubert himself, to the effect that, on searching his memory, he had a dim recollection of being brought to a strange nurse by a dark man-servant.

"You never thought of that till they put it into your head," said Everard, a faint colour rising into his cheeks and dying away as quickly as it came. "But I mustn't interrupt."

The doctor read on to the end, and said :

"It is wonderfully strong. I can't find a loop-hole in it. But they might as well have brought forward the dark man-servant, if he ever existed, and isn't dead."

"I should think so, indeed," said Everard. "But, in reference to the certificate, which they pretend to have given or sold, a strange idea has this moment come into my head. Hubert, you must go for me to the muniment room (Mrs. Roland will give you the key) and look in a small drawer of the oak cabinet for a bunch of keys, one of which will open the centre doors of the cabinet. In one of the little drawers inside you will find a foreign letter, directed to Sir Richard in a handwriting that you are not likely to forget. Please be as quick about it as you

can. I can't think why it never struck me before."

Hubert ran off, and in a few minutes returned with the letter. Everard opened it, and taking a half sheet, on which the writing was different from the rest, handed it to Doctor Ranston, saying :

"Do you know this?"

"Yes, I do," said the doctor. "I see it is the certificate of the death of Hubert Freville, signed by me. I had forgotten it; but now I remember being called in to see an English child who was dying. I was travelling with an invalid, and we stopped to bait at Alassio. The child died, and then I was asked by the nurse to write this certificate for the satisfaction of the family. That accounts for my puzzle when I first heard your name."

"And mine too, when you gave me your card in the railway carriage. It suddenly occurred to me just now that yours was the name on that certificate; and so I sent for it."

"Then, in fact, he was your brother?"

"We always supposed so, but I begin to doubt it. Do you remember the date?"

"No; but I remember putting the whole story down in a journal, which I can find and bring here the next time I come. But how can it affect the question that you are working at?"

"I don't know yet: but a strange suspicion struck me when you were reading that part of the evidence where the landlady mentions having lost the certificate, and the other woman acknowledged that she sold it to somebody unknown, for

an English sovereign. I want to know whether you saw or heard of an uncle who was his guardian, and was with him—the brother of my father's second wife"——

"Moncalvo," whispered Hubert.

"Not then," said Doctor Ranston: "but I have an indistinct recollection of the name, or something like it. Some one called on me afterwards at Florence to thank me for attending the child. I can't remember what his name was; but I think I should know his face, if I were to see him. But why should she have wanted a certificate to take home, if an uncle or guardian was there?"

"Well," said Everard, "I can account for that. He wished to send it to Sir Richard. But his not appearing at Alassio has a very suspicious look about it, particularly as I have been told that the nurse in charge of my brother was ill at the time."

"Exactly," said Hubert. "Depend upon it, the old women at Chase End are right. He heard of the death of a Hubert Freville at Alassio, made away with your brother, got hold of the certificate of the child's death, and made one pass for the other. Coming from England, he would be likely to have English money about him."

Everard's countenance darkened, but he said nothing. He rang the bell; then leaving the room before it could be answered, met the servant in the hall, and asked to see Mrs. Roland. Mrs. Roland came, and he said:

"What has become of Charlotte Wilcox? I have not seen her since I came home. I want to

see her very much ; for, between ourselves, I am beginning to suspect that there really may be some sort of truth in her story."

"I always thought there might be something in it, my lord," said Mrs. Roland. "I am sorry to say she is not here just now. I sent her to stay with my cousin at Peveridge Bay, for the sea-air. I advised her to go, because she had got into such a low way, particularly since you have been ill, and has been harping more than ever on the death of the poor child. But I can write and get her home again."

"Do, by this post. It may be very important."

He went back into the gallery, but remained silent for a little time. At last he said to Dr. Ranston :

"You don't happen to remember, I suppose, whether the child you saw had dark or light eyes and hair ?"

"I don't," said the doctor ; "but, if I am not mistaken, you will find my journal rather minute about the whole affair."

Everard asked no more questions, and said no more against the evidence. The cross-examination had shaken nothing, and independent witnesses corroborated its most important parts. Hubert's dim recollection of being taken to a strange nurse was the last feather in the scale. It remained for Everard to find out who Hubert was, and to solve the mystery of the two certificates. There was the one lying on the table, and, if the landlady had told the truth (which he had now no right to doubt), there was or had been

another, for which an English sovereign had been paid. Were they the same? What, if they were? The Marquis Moncalvo had certainly sent Dr. Ranston's.

"I don't know where I am, nor what may come out of this," thought Everard: "but, come what may, I must go through with it."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Costly thy habit as thy purse can buy.—HAMLET.

THE wisdom of this attractive advice may perhaps be questioned, as being even more indefinite than the pompous principle of dressing according to one's position, which allows much to subjective notions of grandeur and gives no rule of measurement to restrain excess : but, whether Polonius was right or not, his advice is popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Lady Dytchley believed in it, though she had never read *Hamlet* except in a play-book at the Princess's, and she applied the principle with a certain amount of judgment on certain occasions, one of which occurred in the evening of the next day.

Notwithstanding Sir Richard's repeated declarations that he didn't care for anybody, she believed very much in the power of pressure, and was prepared to use it with discretion at a suitable time. In the meanwhile she had a design on foot, in accordance with which Elfrida and Sir Richard were decoyed off to the Théâtre Français, and the Marquis Moncalvo was cited to appear, under threats of unpleasant inquiries in case of default. He

Started [in both senses] *like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons.*

and applied opprobrious epithets to himself for not having left Paris : but he had to go.

Lady Dytchley's dress, when she received him, was impressive and symbolical. The stiffness of the skirt, the strongly-marked lines and vigorous contrasts of the trimming, the portentous length and springy movements of the train, all impressed him with the idea of a purpose intended and means of carrying out the same to his disadvantage. The quantity and quality of the materials, together with the art displayed in making them up on so large a scale, were typical of care, experience and resources. When he entered the room, between eight and nine in the evening, the manner of his reception convinced him that there was more in the symbolism of dress than he had hitherto supposed. From a centre of rustling silk, that hid the arms of her chair, she rose very slowly, and holding her right hand before her without offering it, looked at him as Queen Elizabeth would have looked at the "proud prelate," had he been present when she wrote at the end of her letter, "*Yours as you demean yourself.*" Then, drawing her hand back as soon as he had taken it, she sat down again between outspreading masses of drapery, and said :

"Is this the way you spend the honeymoon, after playing the *spasimato*, and suppressing letters to deceive everybody, and getting off by the forbearance of a man who could have crushed out your life in a moment and would have been justified in doing it? Yes! justified—you know that better than I do. What are you doing here, after all your professions and sentimentality, and swear-

ing (by all that is sacred) how you only cared to be dancing attendance on Ida, and only wanted to have the chance of showing your wonderful devotion? What have you done? Has she found you out? I don't envy you if she has."

"I am very sorry that you should have formed (I cannot tell how) so bad an opinion of me. I have had business in Paris, and am going to return immediately—this evening, if my visit here will allow me time to do so. As to the letters you speak of, you are hardly aware, I think, how grave a charge you are making without any grounds for it. Why am I to be made responsible for the post, and for every courier and every boy who may be sent to convey a letter to the post-office?"

The drapery rose and fell in ominous waves.

"That will do now," said Lady Dytechley, accompanying the words with the short laugh that Sir Richard remembered so well, in connection with the terribly productive tantrum in the family coach. "Don't pretend anything to me. I know you, and you know that I do. Don't provoke me, or you will have cause to repent it; but listen to what I am going to say. You have heard, I suppose, if you ever get any letters from Ida (which I doubt very much), that Elfrida was engaged to be married"——

"To Hubert Freville," said the Marquis, making a shrewd guess out of his observations at Netherwood and in the Bois de Boulogne. "I am very glad to hear it. I have the greatest regard for him, though he put me into a most painful

position not long ago. When is the marriage to be?"

"Never! and you must help it not to be."

The Marquis was not a man to be easily taken aback; but this imperious proposal was too much for him. His lips turned white and quivered.

"I am unable to understand your meaning," he said. "Why do you wish to break off a marriage that would be so satisfactory in all respects?"

"Why? It's just as I expected. Ida has found you out, and you have come away for that reason (don't talk to me about having business in Paris), and you don't hear from her. Now don't deny it. If it were not so, you would have heard all that has come out lately about that unfortunate young man"—

"I was not likely to hear anything; for I have had to put off my journey from day to day, and I have not seen any one who knows him, or who has any connection with England. But I will not and cannot believe anything against him."

"And who said there was anything against him? Isn't it enough that he turns out to be—what are you getting so white for? Don't make a scene, for goodness' sake. Isn't it enough that he turns out to be the son of nobody-knows-who, but something very low, at any rate, and was put in the place of Lord de Freville's heir, who died on the journey home from Sorrento to Beynham? The two women who played the trick have come forward and confessed it all; and the lawyers examined into it before Lord de Freville died; and (to make it quite clear) Everard

is now Lord de Freville. Now that being the case, who and what is the young man who has gone by the name of Hubert Freville? Why the son or nephew of the Italian nurse, of course, who got rid of the expense of him by palming him off on Lord de Freville as his nephew, and then got money for confessing the truth. You *must* have sense enough to see that. Do you suppose that I am going to sit down tamely and let my daughter make such a marriage as that? Now there are two things that you must do. In the first place, you must get me the proof of his being her son"——

"You require an impossibility."

"No, I don't."

"Really, you do. How could I prove it, even if it were true?"

"I was going to tell you how—only you *would* interrupt me. You must go to Lynham"——

"No!" said the Marquis emphatically. "I cannot go there. Surely you must see that I cannot under present circumstances."

"You should have thought of the circumstances before you made them. You will either do as I tell you in every particular, or I shall tell Ida what you did with Sir Richard's telegram about Everard. I heard that from the courier, from whom you got it under pretence of taking it to me. He is with me now. Don't dare me, or I will bring him up into this room, and have the whole thing out before you. Hold your tongue now! I won't waste any more time in hearing you try to make out that black is white. You must go to the White Hart at Lynham. The

landlady is the other woman—there were two in it—and you must find out from her where the Italian woman is. Then you must go after her, and you must say, ‘I know for certain that he *is* your son’”——

“But how *can* I say that?”

“Hold your tongue! If you don’t, I declare I will ring for the courier and convict you before your face of making away with the telegram, and write straight off to Ida. I know more about you than you think: so don’t let me hear any more excuses. I say that you must tell her that you know him to be her son, and mean to send the police after her, unless she gives the proofs of it, but that if she does so, she shall be rewarded. I will pay her a hundred pounds for the proofs, or more, if you think it necessary: but have them I must. That will be the first thing you have to do. And, I must say, I am surprised at your hesitating about it, after my standing up for you, as I have, against everybody, when you had acted in such a way that I have never got over and never shall get over the disgrace you have brought on us all! Now hear what the other thing is, and don’t interrupt me. It will be for your good, as you will see before I have finished what I have to say.”

The Marquis felt that (to use a familiar French idiom) he must accept the situation, and get out of it afterwards as he best could. Lady Dytchley proceeded to unfold the second part of her instructions.

“If Sir Richard would listen to reason,” she said, “there would be no occasion to do more

than get the proofs I speak of: but he wont. He declares that she shall marry him, whoever he may be. I don't know how *you* may like the idea of your sister-in-law marrying a man like that; but, on every account, *I* am not going to stand it, and, as I shall show you presently, you are as much concerned as anyone. If nothing is done, the marriage will take place within three months. Sir Richard is bent on it, and Elfrida thinks herself bound to fulfil the engagement that she made hastily, out of gratitude to him for resenting—*you know what*. All I want is to gain time. Elfrida really cares for Everard. I have seen that most clearly for a long time; only she wouldn't allow herself to think so, because he was engaged to Ida. She is exactly suited to him, which I don't think Ida was. Now if you can get this young man out of the way (I am going to show you how), she and Everard will be thrown together under different circumstances, when we go back to Netherwood, and then "——

"But I heard that he was not expected to live."

"Nonsense! A man of five and twenty, as strong as a lion, to be killed by a journey after a hard ride! He is better already, and has been on horseback. Wait till he meets Elfrida again, and feels himself free. Why he was riding about with her every day and all day while we were at Florence."

"You have taken a great load off me by your account of him," said the Marquis, "a very great load."

"I am glad to have done so," said Lady Dytchley, "and still more glad to see that you

feel what you have done, and what you owe him. It is in your power to undo the dreadful harm you have done. It is in your power to save the life of the man you deceived, and who spared your life afterwards."

"What am I to do?" said the Marquis. "Anything that I can do for him"——

"You must get this young man away"——

"But he is his best friend. He would never"——

"Fiddle-de-dee! It will be for the good of all. Elfrida is made for Everard. Everard will die, to a certainty, if he is not brought round by finding in her what he only dreamt of in Ida. The other man will be much happier without her; for he isn't suited to her, and she isn't the sort of girl to make it pleasant without. You know what that means, I think."

The Marquis knew too well, but gave no sign of his knowledge.

"You see, then," said Lady Dytechley, "that you will save the name and title and two properties from extinction, do a cheap act of justice where you owe *everything*, and do good to everyone concerned, but particularly to yourself—yes! to yourself—mark that! For when Everard is happy with Elfrida, he will be out of your way. Good gracious! Can't you see that? and you will be able to gain Ida's affections, which you have not gained, and never will, as long as she has in her head the romantic idea that he is dying for her sake. He will be an impassable barrier between you, unless you can show that he is *happy* without her."

A gleam of light, soft and intense, rose up for an instant in the melancholy eyes of the Marquis Moncalvo, and vanished like the flame of a lamp that has no oil to feed it.

"You have given me every possible motive to do as you wish," he said; "but what can I do? You wish me to get him away, out of England, I suppose; but how can I do that—I, of all men in the world? No one could do it but Elfrida, who of course would not."

"I don't know that. She would, if you were to show him the way of finding out his parentage. You can do that through the Italian woman I spoke of just now. Here is her name, you had better take it down. Here it is, mentioned in the last letter Sir Richard had from Hubert. It will only be a question of more or less money, and more or less time; and the longer the time the better for us all. I said that he was the son of that woman, because I was so vexed at the whole thing; but she may be able to prove the contrary. She declares that he is of high birth, and he has every appearance of being so. You must ferret it out through her, and then make her write to him, saying that she has it all in train, but that nothing further can be done, unless he comes himself. Then you must make delays, and if you could manage to have some part of the evidence in America or Australia"——

"You must be joking," said the Marquis. "How can I make the evidence be where it is not?"

"Don't provoke me to remind you what you can do in cases where stratagems are said to be

allowed. You have done such things for a bad purpose, and you shall do them now for a good one, or you will bitterly repent your refusal when too late—mark my words, you shall!”

“You mistake me. I am not refusing to do what I can. I only want you to think of something that can be done without compromising not only myself, but you and all your family. Surely you would not like to see the husband of your own child acting like a common impostor.”

“Of course not. What is the use of talking in that way? But can’t you see that there are all sorts of clues to a thing? Sometimes the one that seems nothing at all turns out to be the very one you wanted. In a case like this, there are sure to be numbers of witnesses. One or two of them are sure to have gone away, nobody knows where; and, unless you try those distant countries, where everybody goes now when they can’t get on at home, how in the world can you get at the truth? There now—that will do. I am going to stay on here for some time by myself, on purpose to see you after you have been to Lyneham, and hear what you have done. You mustn’t stop any longer; for Sir Richard won’t stay long at the Théâtre Français, and you had better not be seen here, just at this particular time, considering all circumstances and all that may come out of everything.”

The Marquis was of the same opinion, and having the further inducement of not knowing how many more threatening proposals might be in store for him if he stayed longer, de-

parted with more inward alacrity than he cared to show.

"Can I really win Ida at last," he thought, "and save Everard after all? But then"——

A deep gloom settled on his features as he hurried away, trying to think without reflecting and reconcile the incompatible.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNCONSCIOUS of Lady Dytechley's plan for securing the happiness of every one, Hubert had gone to Beynham. The Marquis Moncalvo left Paris, but not his address, early in the morning. Sir Richard, perceiving that Lady Dytechley was herself again, took interior counsel, and remembering to his cost her Biblical quotations, told himself, with serio-comic earnestness, that he must flee from the wrath to come. He began to assert that his presence was required at home ; whereupon Lady Dytechley said, " I have been thinking so. And you are losing all the hunting too. I had rather not go back myself just at present, for all our sakes ; but if you go first with Elfrida, I can follow soon. Why not write now, and start the day after to-morrow ? "

" I'll be off like a shot," thought Sir Richard ; " but I don't see why I should make a toil of a pleasure by travelling right on end, like a Queen's messenger."

Three days afterwards he set out, and went as far as Boulogne, where he sent a telegraphic message to Hubert at Beynham, saying :

" Come to Netherwood on Saturday. We shall be there by Friday evening."

Hubert was then on his way to Freville Chase, and near his journey's end. Everard was looking dreamily out of the southern bay window, watching from its western corner the crimson sunset, as it deepened and expanded till the last streak of its light had sunk beneath the purple outline of the distant hills. The bay itself, one of the projecting gables on the south side of the house, was on the right of a smaller one; there was another beyond that, and two others projected from the ends of the gallery towards the east and west. The four larger bays formed as many small rooms within the gallery, looking over part of the Chase on the left and the terraced garden to the front, with the woods beyond. On the west, through a vista of chestnut trees, the view stretched out to the hills behind Bramscote. In the bay where Everard sat there was a writing-table covered with letters, books and architect's plans. Having been advised by Dr. Ranston to avoid going upstairs, he had chosen this place, instead of his room in the tower, because it commanded the same view over the Chase valley, besides the slope down the terraced garden towards the woods, and the rich landscape crowned by an undulating line of dark-blue hills.

"And the old race will pass away soon," he thought, "like that setting sun. Thank God, here at least we have kept the Faith. This house has seen evil days, and some of mine—perhaps, have not been the best; but such as they were, they are past—and time, with all it contains, is passing from me, drifting by like a snow storm that darkens all but itself. I have failed to disprove the

evidence that makes me the last of the Frevilles. I have failed as yet to find the smallest trace of Hubert's parentage, or even to show that he is not the son of a low adventuress, as every one but myself will of course believe him to be. Would it were the worst failure! The old race has done some good work in its time, and I trust, will not die dishonoured. Sooner or later all human things must come to an end; but Faith belongs to the illimitable in time and in hope. When the tie that bound my whole being was severed, torn asunder, shivered to atoms, one link remained yet possible, that link which death cannot break. I have failed to secure it—and who shall help her now? There is no one but myself to do it—and only when I am dead. I must write a letter to her, and leave directions to have it given after my death. . . . I must write it now, while I can. Why did I never think of it till now, when I am exhausted and incapable of any effort? I must write it as well as I can, and do it better afterwards, if I live."

He took the nearest sheet of paper, and wrote these words :

"It is my desire and my duty to tell you two things before I die; and, as my life cannot be reckoned on from one hour to the next, the present moment is the only safe one. I earnestly beg you to believe that I do not blame you at all for acting as you did under the circumstances in which you found yourself after leaving England, circumstances which I know not, but which I can easily guess. I entreat you to believe that as it stands,

for I have no right now to say more, nor you to listen. But I have another thing to say, another request to make—and it is quite my last. Attend, I implore you, by all that might have been and cannot be, to these few words. The position you were in at Florence and in Rome, which made the position that you now must accept and do your duty in, would not have been yours if you had not delayed returning to the faith of your baptism, when God had again infused into you what you had lost in your infancy without any fault of your own. If you had acted according to the light He gave you before there was any question of going abroad, you would have had a confessor to consult in your great difficulties, who would have advised you with prudence and experience. I am not blaming you for having put yourself in so helpless a position. Your difficulties before you left home were terrible and complicated. I know what they were, and I accept the consequences as the will of God for my own sins. I only speak of the fact, for the purpose of showing that the duty which was difficult and complicated six months ago is now easy, simple and imperative. Listen, I implore you, to these my last words from the brink of the grave.”

He put it into an envelope directed to Hubert, and wrote on the inside, “*To be given to Ida as soon as I am dead.*”

“It had better lie there,” he thought; “and then Hubert will have it, whatever happens.”

He drew back his chair suddenly, and rising from it in haste, yet not without an effort, moved away towards the other end of the room. His

face had a pink flush on it. Self-repression was pictured in his eyes. All his pulses were dangerously quickened.

"I thought all that was past," he said aloud. "I thought I had built a wall of ice between her image and myself; yet the mere act of writing her name has raised fire and tempest within me when life is passing away. I have written it now, and it will not have to be written again. I cannot, dare not, write it again."

He wandered back to his chair, and turned it half round, facing the length of the room opposite the south bays. The panelled wall was covered with old family portraits. Most of them had been left there by the apostate Lord de Freville when he sold the property to his younger brother. The last glow of sunset yet remaining in the western sky above the line of hills, threw quaint lights and shadows over some of them, leaving the rest in deep shade.

"How that one seems to look at me out of his frame!" he thought, forcing a smile and trying to fix his attention on the portraits. "I hope he is not ashamed of the last Freville."

The golden hue of twilight melted into dusk, and the old portraits faded away, till nothing was left but their dim shadows in frames of carved oak tinted with gilding. Candles were brought in, but he made no use of them.

"I wish that somebody would come," he thought, "and make me talk of something, think of something. I ought to have measured my own powers before I wrote her name."

He turned the chair to the writing-table and

looked at the plans of the church, but his eyes rested on them without taking notice. The image of Ida was before him, dim indeed by reason of his immense effort to make it so, but still there, though shrouded in darkness. Again he rose from the chair and began to walk across the gallery, but had not gone many steps when Father Merivale came in.

"I came to see how you were going on," said Father Merivale. "I am afraid you have been doing too much."

"I suppose I have," said Everard, sitting down on the nearest seat. "People wanted to see me, and I don't like to be inaccessible. If I have gathered anything out of history and experience, half the misunderstandings and complications in the world have come from that; and I wish to avoid it in my own small sphere."

"You are quite right," said Father Merivale; "but, when a valuable life is in question, prudence must go before zeal. There is no danger of your being misunderstood about here. You have been overdone to-day in some way or other."

"I have, yet not entirely in that way. Hubert's business has weighed on me heavily since I found that nothing could be done. Dr. Ranston has not been able yet to put his hand on the missing volume of his journal. Even Charlotte Wilcox is detained by illness at Peveridge Bay. And then there was another thing that I tell you, and you only. I wrote a few lines, to be given after my death—I needn't say to whom. They were simply to say—but here it is. Perhaps you will take charge of it, and give it to Hubert when he comes.

Tell him to take it to her when I am dead. I wish you to read it some day."

Tears came into Father Merivale's eyes as he took the letter.

"I feel sure that you have done well about it," he said, "admirably well." "Now let me tell you where I have been to-day, and who I have seen. I have a budget of small news. I went to Lyneham, partly to do your commission at the White Hart, and partly (I think) to show off the new turnout you gave me. I put on a new coat, to be in keeping with the rest, and make Popery look respectable on market-day. The pony made a sensation in the yard at the White Hart, and Gingerem the dealer said he knew a 'party' that wouldn't mind going up to a hundred to get him. Then I went in, and saw the landlady. She told me to say that she had not heard from her leech-like acquaintance lately; and then she insisted on going into the whole story. I think there can be no doubt whatever (so it appears to me) that her account of the transaction is true; but I also think with you that, at the beginning, she was simply let in for it by the other. There is no malice in her, but when the temptation was put in her way, she was too lymphatic to stand against the influence of a strong will, without a stronger support than she has ever had. Then I went to Curling's to have my hair cut, and I met my old acquaintance (with a new name since I saw him last) De Beaufoy, and Sherborne with him. They both admired the pony and the new carriage critically, but they said nothing about my new coat; so I called their attention to it. De Beaufoy

was of opinion that Lady Ledchester would see in the whole turn-out a scheme for wholesale conversion, under the patronage of the Pope. All the world and his wife were in Lyneham, as if by common consent. Lady Oxborough had driven in with her son Mr. Exmore and his intended. How she remembered me I don't know ; for I never was introduced to her, and only saw her once for a few minutes at Bramscote. But somehow she appeared to know all about me, and talked a great deal about Freville Chase, and made particular inquiries about you."

"If she had made inquiries about me six months ago," thought Everard, "she would not have assisted in wrecking two lives and destroying a family." But he only said :

"I am much obliged to her. What else did she say ?"

Father Merivale saw the cloud that passed over his face, and wished that Lady Oxborough had been somewhere else on that day.

"She sent expansive messages," he said ; "and I think they were genuine. Then she asked me whether you were well enough to see people, as her son's fiancée had heard so much of the place, and she asked if she might bring her here one afternoon. I gave a guarded answer, and put it all on the shoulders of Dr. Ranston."

"Thank you ; but I may as well face it at once, and ask them to luncheon. If I could bear what I have borne to-day I can bear anything. Did you see anyone else ?"

"Yes, I wish I had not. I saw Sir Roger Arden, and he too asked me a question that I

turned off from myself to Dr. Ranston, who is a very useful bugbear to keep people from bothering you. So you are not compromised in any way, nor expected to do anything."

"Thanks to you," said Everard. "What made you think of coming to see me just now, and amusing me so much, when I wanted you so particularly?"

"I am not aware of any distinct information about it," said Father Merivale; "but I know what you are and what you have done, and what you have suffered and are suffering. There is no one living that I know so well, or have so great a regard for, from my complete knowledge of you; and I knew that you were alone, which you ought not to be. It would have been odd indeed if I had not come to see you as soon as I could. But I must tell you what Sir Roger said; for it will amuse you, knowing his peculiarities. By the by, I forgot to say that I saw your friend the red-whiskered man, as large as life. I can't claim the honour of his acquaintance, but De Beaufoy told me who he was, and how he shot Sir Richard instead of a partridge, and made all sorts of blunders with excellent intentions. He is either married or going to be married to somebody from somewhere, and is staying now in the neighbourhood with some one. But here I am at fault, and so I had better go back to Sir Roger. He came while old Curling was intent on rubbing a lot of bear's grease into my head, and told me that he wanted to have a few minutes' conversation. I was alarmed, having always found that a similar request meant something unpleasant and puzzling;

but I followed him, of course, as soon as I was released. He took me to the White Hart, as if I had not had enough of it in the morning, and went into that sitting-room in a corner, with a picture of a yeomanry review, and the shop opposite, where I have seen a print of a Newfoundland dog and small boys bawling in surplices for the last twenty years. He fidgeted about, and looked at the pictures inside and out, and coughed in a preliminary way. I have known him many years, and know his worth, and know how he dislikes doing a small thing of a disagreeable kind; so I knew that something disagreeable in a small way had been put upon him, and he let it out by degrees, after he had emphatically said, 'What a nuisance people are, coming and bothering one like that!' 'Who has been bothering you?' said I, for I saw he wanted me to assist in bringing out the bother. 'Why, Lady Dytchley has been writing a long rigmarole,' he said, 'and wants me to make up a dinner-party when she comes back, and take part in a scheme to set people right, and all that. But I don't see why I am to be made to get up a dinner-party for a purpose. I hate purposes in society. They always mean something disagreeable.'"

"Ah, just the sort of thing that would bore Sir Roger," said Everard. "He would do anything to serve anyone, in any way, except entering into social diplomacy and abstract ideas. But what can Lady Dytchley want now? Has she a quarrel with anybody?"

"Well, you'll see. To make a long story short, the upshot of it was this. Lady Dytchley sent a

present of a fur pelisse from Paris for his little granddaughter, Miss Sherborne, but sent it to Bramscote, having heard that the Sherbornes were or might be away from home. She wrote therefore to Sir Roger, asking him to forward the parcel if they were at Hazeley, and telling him that she should have to stay another three weeks or more in Paris, for dressmaking arrangements, preparatory to her daughter's wedding. When he had got as far as that he stood with his back to the grate, which had nothing in it but coloured paper, and his face assumed a rueful aspect. 'Then are you expected to set the dressmakers right?' said I. He got up a very faint smile, out of pure civility, and then he stood and unfolded himself. He said, 'What am I to do? She wants me to ask Lord de Freville to meet her and Lady Oxborough at dinner, in three weeks or thereabouts—or rather when she comes home, and she lets out why. It seems that Lady Oxborough has said, or been reported to have said, that Lord de Freville wont speak to Lady Dytechley, and this is a scheme to show Lady Oxborough publicly that he will. 'He may or may not be able to go,' said I, 'but either way'—I couldn't get the rest out, for he burst in with, 'Look here! she wants to make a cat's paw of me to ask him, and get him to come out of friendship to myself. It's not at all a proper position to put either of us in, and very wrong towards him. Why is he to be trapped into meeting them both, just to please Lady Dytechley? Let them fight it out somewhere else. Now I want him to know how it is, and it's a very awkward subject for me to write about.'

I saw what he wanted, so I promised that I would explain the whole thing to you, and I came away."

"I am quite prepared to go," said Everard, with a faint smile; "and you are bound to advise it, out of reverence for your old Benedictine motto, Pax."

Father Merivale looked at him for a moment, and said in a tone of deep feeling:

"The resolution is heroic, but I hope you won't think of carrying it out."

"Why not?"

"Not at the cost of doing harm to yourself, when your health is of such immense importance, and when you are not, in any sense whatever, responsible for the result."

"But suppose it does me no harm? Won't it be a right thing to do then?"

"It would be more than right. It would be an heroic thing to do. But I can't advise what I think would be dangerous. You will see her and speak to her by and by, in the natural course of things, and that will be a sufficient contradiction to the report, if any exists, which I rather doubt. Why are you to have the first meeting in public, just to save her a little annoyance that she ought to feel? I don't see it at all. Sir Roger is quite right. It isn't a proper position for you to be placed in. Why can't she come home at once, and ask to see you here, and get it over quietly? It's all nonsense about the wedding-dresses. Why can't she get them from London like other people? I am sure Miss Dytchley doesn't want such a fuss

about them. No, no. The more I think of it, the less I like the looks of it."

"It certainly doesn't bear very close inspection. But then the example may do good to some one; and as for what people may say or think about my going there to meet her—I am past all that."

"Yes, but there is such a thing as opening wounds."

"True; but how can one open what has never closed?"

"Well, you have three weeks to decide in; but I entreat you to be careful. I must say that the impudence of the proposal exceeds anything of the kind that I ever heard of; but there is more *savoir faire* in it than I gave her credit for. I don't at all like the idea of your going. I am more afraid of it than I can account for. But we have had enough of it for the present, and too much. Have you been on horseback to-day?"

"Yes; but I expected Hubert, and came back soon; and then I took to looking over those plans and other business affairs. Then half-a-dozen people wanted to see me. I wish Hubert would come. Elfrida will be at Netherwood to-morrow or next day, and the more Sir Richard is reminded of him the better. Perhaps he will come by the five o'clock train."

"I thought I heard the big bell," said Father Merivale. "Let me see if he is there. If he is, I will be off."

"But I hope you are coming to dinner?"

"As punctually as the dinner-bell."

He left the room, and in a few minutes Hubert came in, saying :

"I couldn't come earlier. I have done a lot of things that I must tell you of presently. But first of all, there is an important letter for you to read, from the Italian woman."

"What is the gist of it?" said Everard.

"She says that she has got a clue to the name of my father, but has been obliged to go a long way about it; and she wants me to meet her somewhere in Calabria, where somebody is who can tell me all about it. You will see that she tells me where I am to find her."

"It seems odd that the landlady had heard nothing," said Everard. "Father Merivale inquired for me to-day."

"Well, at all events, I can't go. I can't possibly leave you for so long. In the first place, you have been too much alone, in spite of me, these last few days"——

"Never mind that. Besides, Elfrida and Sir Richard are coming to Netherwood to-morrow—I had a letter from her this morning—and I will ask them to come and stay here while you are away. The matter is too serious to be trifled with, and you must go. But be careful. We know nothing about this woman, and her face is against her. She might put you on a wrong scent, for fear of getting into trouble with the right people. Don't give her money till she has done what she undertook, or, at anyrate, not more than just enough to keep her going. If you start to-morrow by the half-past four train, and sleep

in London, you will see Elfrida before you go, for they will be here by three. Now come and look at these plans and sketches that came by to-day's post. The style of the church, as you will see, is Early English of Edward the First's time. It will take all the time before dinner to look them over, and more too."

Which it did.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THATE the next day Hubert, after seeing Elfrida for a few minutes, went to London on his way to Calabria or elsewhere. Sir Richard tried to be cheerful at intervals, but shook his head as often as Everard looked the other way, and muttered audibly more than once :

“ If I had but taken Father Merivale’s friendly advice ! ”

The next morning he went to Netherwood for the day, and Everard rode out with Elfrida.

“ Have you got through the copy of the evidence,” he said, “ that I gave you last night to read ? ”

“ Yes, and your comments. There is nothing more to be said. Oh ! if I could but have overtaken that dreadful Italian woman last autumn, (you remember) when we rode here from Netherwood—I always felt that she had something to say, and that you were being defrauded of your rights in some way or other. If I had seen her, I might have got the truth from her then, and we might have been all happy, instead of—I hardly like to say it, but my mother might not then have ”——

“ Don’t distress yourself by thinking about that,”

said Everard. "I wished at the time that you could have seen her ; but, on reflection, I felt sure that you could have done nothing. I should not have been justified in acceding to such terms as hers, and, if I had, I should have been placed in a most painful position as regards Hubert. One can't make out at first sight why she offered what nobody would have accepted ; but the fact was that she cared very little, comparatively, about me. She expected to get more from Hubert for saving everything, than from me for enabling me to grab it. She was sharp enough to wait until after Christmas, when he came of age, before she tried it on with him. And now the death of two Hubert Frevilles, and that English sovereign given for the certificate, have yet to be explained. I don't like to think about it till I have got some information that I shall have soon."

"And I," said Elfrida, "have something on my mind that I can't bear to think of, and can't get out of my head, and can't understand. That dreadful man was with my mother a long while, one evening in Paris, while my father and I were at the Théâtre Français. I never knew that he was in Paris till afterwards, when my maid told me that he had come. Now what he could have come for I can't imagine ; but"——

"When was it ?" said Everard, pulling his horse back on his haunches.

"About a week ago."

His lips turned white, but he rode on.

"Why did I tell him this ?" thought Elfrida. "I ought to have had more sense." "I wish I had said nothing about it," she said aloud. "He was

sure to come, being in Paris, and sure to choose a time when I was out, because he knows that I never could bear the sight of him. There can't be anything in it. What could he do? My mother knows him too well to trust him now."

Everard rode on, but gave no answer till he had gone some distance. At last he said:

"Very true. When one has had one's head so full of private conspiracies for so long, one looks at things too much from that point of view. Now tell me something about yourself. It will be a very pleasant change, and I can do no good by talking of these other things just now. But first, let me too talk of something pleasant for once. I want to tell you all that Hubert did for me in Rome—I must have died but for him—and how heroically he has behaved since, under a most crushing blow, immensely aggravated by coming upon him when it did."

Their ride was short and slow.

"How unlike our former rides!" thought Elfrida, as they turned homewards.

He read her thoughts in her expression, and said: "The doctor curtails my riding just now, as you see; but I hope to get out of leading-strings after a bit."

When they reached home, he was told that the landlady of the White Hart wanted to see him.

She came in gradually, as if feeling her way on yet uncertain ground.

"I beg your pardon, my lord, for disturbing you so soon again; but I heard from her this morning, and she says that she can't get further without more money."

"Where did she write from?" said Everard, with a calmness so evidently forced that she became alarmed on her own account, and spoke unsteadily.

"Well, my lord," she said, "I can't quite make out the name of the place; but it seems to be somewhere in France, where her cousin had gone. Here it is."

Everard looked at the letter, examined the handwriting carefully, put it back into her hand, and said: "Thank you. I will let you know if there is anything further that you can do at present."

She backed out of the room, and was glad to do so; but, in the meantime, he had rung the bell, and then he gave an order that startled the household.

"I want my things packed for travelling," he said. "I shall go this evening by the eight o'clock train from Lyneham."

Dr. Ranston was expected before dinner-time, but he arrived early in the afternoon. When he came into the room he looked fixedly at Everard for a moment, felt his pulse, and said:

"What have you been doing with yourself since I left?"

"Nothing," said Everard; "but something has been done that forces me to start for Calabria this evening."

Dr. Ranston sat down, and putting off his serious manner, said:

"Have you been reading the 'Castle of Ot-ranto'? If I didn't know you so well, I should *think* that you were trying to get a rise out of me.

But jesting apart, it is simply impossible for you to go. I would sooner go myself, though I have more work to do than I can get through. What is the matter? Things can always be settled quietly by a little management."

"Generally speaking they can," said Everard; "but this case is exceptional. You remember the evidence that Hubert brought, the last time you were here. I promised to pay the Italian woman, if she could find who his father is or was, and she promised to do so, if she could. The day before yesterday Hubert had a letter from her, saying that she had found a clue to it, and asking him to meet her in Calabria. He started yesterday. This afternoon, just before you arrived, the other woman from the White Hart at Lynham came here, bringing a letter from her, asking for more money, and dated from a place in the south of France. Now the letter asking for money bears the stamp of truth, considering the character of the writer, and therefore the other letter, that pretends to be from Calabria—I only wish I had looked at the postmarks—must be a forgery, or a trap."

"I don't see how it can. The woman has every inducement to act straightforwardly. It would be dead against her own interest to do otherwise."

"She couldn't possibly have been at the same time in the south of France and in Calabria," said Everard.

"No, but she may have been on her way to Calabria, and written for money to get on, meaning the landlady to ask you for it. Was the handwriting the same in the two letters?"

"In my hurry I forgot to notice the handwriting of the first letter. It was a foreign-looking handwriting, and so was the other : but foreigners of that class write very much alike. I don't suspect her. I suspect a man whose treachery I have experienced. He was with Lady Dytechley more than an hour last week in Paris, during the carefully arranged absence of Sir Richard and of Elfrida, whose marriage with Hubert she has lately tried to prevent. She has failed in her object ; but I know her too well to suppose that she has given it up, and I know that the Fabian policy would occur to her as her only chance. Now she is very likely to have expressed a strong wish that Hubert were out of the way for a time, and that man, being in bad odour with her now ; and anxious of course to set himself right, would not be scrupulous as to the means he employed. I suspect that the letter supposed to have come from Calabria was written by him, or by somebody for him, and if"——

"Surely," interrupted Dr. Ranston, laughing, "you don't suppose he would get brigands to attack him, and shut him up in a cave till further orders?"

"It's no use laughing about it," said Everard, becoming strangely excited.

"No, no," said Dr. Ranston, perceiving his mistake and much more. "I wasn't laughing at the thing itself, which of course might occur, even in these prosaic days, and would, as you say, be consistent with the antecedents of the man you suspect. What I meant, and ought to have said *at first*, was, that in this case there is no adequate

motive for acting so, but just the reverse. He isn't a fool. He would know perfectly well that the thing must be traced to him, and could only ruin his character with every one, for no conceivable purpose or advantage to himself. That was what I meant."

"I know what you meant; but this is no case for weighing motives that one can't understand without being on the spot and knowing all the circumstances. I know the man, and I know that he wouldn't stick at doing the thing. I know that Hubert would show fight, and I know what the end of that must be among a set of ruffians. Why didn't I make him take a brace of revolvers with him?—I have been a fool throughout the whole business, and particularly in advising him to go. He didn't want to go, and I pressed him to go. I got him into the danger, and I will get him out of it, whatever happens. He was to stop in Paris to call on Lady Dytchley, and by starting to-night I may catch him up. There is no other chance. Don't try to prevent me, for I won't listen to anything."

"What I was going to propose, my dear lord," said Dr. Ranston, in a very gentle tone, "would help you to the object you have in view. Why not send that excellent servant of yours, who was in Rome with you? You could send a letter by him, and the thing would be done. Whereas, if you go tearing off like this, in your present condition, you are almost certain, I grieve to have to say it, but I must—you are almost certain to be dead before the train gets half-way to Paris. I only

want you to do what will insure success, instead of what would prevent it."

"I suppose I must," said Everard, leaning back in his chair, exhausted and faint. "You are right, of course; but I find it hard to realise how very little I can do now. I beg your pardon for talking so big."

"Why?" said the doctor. "You were quite right to feel as you did. I only wish you were able to do as you would, though the other way will answer all the purpose. Now just let me write the letter for you, and tell the man what he has to do—I understand it all perfectly—and you go and rest in your own room. Keep perfectly quiet till dinner-time, and let your mind rest by feeling sure, as you really may feel, that all will be done satisfactorily."

"I will. You are always doing me some great kindness. Tell Hubert in your letter to come back at once, and please tell Elfrida something that won't frighten her; for she must hear that I am sending after him."

In a few minutes Dr Ranston had given Everard's orders to the servant and begun the letter to Hubert.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

*Tout est illustre en lui, moi-même
je l'avone,
Mais son sang, que le ciel n'a formé
que de bone. . . .*
CORNEILLE. DON SANCHE.

BUT Hubert was already in Paris, intending to start for Marseilles the same evening. He called on Lady Dytchley and found her at home, writing a note. She was moderately dressed and mild in manner, but seemed rather more glad to see him than circumstances warranted.

"I am so glad you have come," she said, "and so unexpectedly too. And yet how provoking! Elfrida is gone home with her father."

"Yes, I saw her at Freville Chase just before I left," said Hubert. "They are staying there till I go back."

"Ah! I am so glad. It will be so good for Everard. How is he?"

"He has been better; but the excitement and worry of my sudden start has thrown him back."

"How very sad it is that he, who deserves every happiness, has always had some disappointment or other! I could see it long ago when he and Ida used to be together at Netherwood; and yet anyone would have thought then that nothing

could be more suitable, or give a better promise of happiness. But alas! it was not so."

"What does she mean?" thought Hubert. "The promise would have taken care of itself, if she had let it alone."

Lady Dytechley sighed, and there was an uncomfortable weight in the sigh, as when she sighed before Ida at Florence, while speaking of Everard and his imputed cheerfulness.

Hubert felt that something was wrong, and she, perceiving his embarrassment, was the more confident in speech.

"What can be the matter now?" she said. "I had hoped that, after the one bitter awakening had been gone through, he would—but what is this? and what is this sudden start that you speak of? What brings you all of a sudden to Paris?"

"A letter, offering to prove who I am. For Elfrida's sake, for yours, for every one's, I had to start without delay."

"Is that all? Then, I am sure, there is nothing that need worry him; for no one would doubt your being well born, whoever your parents may prove to be, in the *dénouement* of this romantic story."

"I don't know about that; but I had rather make sure of the fact."

"You are quite right, of course. I was reasoning like a woman, and thinking that you are sufficient in yourself to make any mother satisfied with her daughter's fate. I am sure I feel more than satisfied in every possible respect—except, unhappily, one—and that has nothing to do with yourself."

Hubert changed colour, and his voice faltered when he spoke.

"I have felt that," he said, "more than anyone. I believe, on account of Elfrida, but most of all for the sake of Everard, whose chances of recovery have been and are endangered by it. In two hours I shall be on my way, and you may feel assured that I shall have neither rest nor peace till I can prove what I have now the clue to."

Lady Dytechley sighed again: it was a sympathetic sigh, long and broken.

"If that were all!" she said, after a pause that appeared to stretch out beyond its own length. "Oh, if it were only that! As I said before, you are sufficient in yourself to make any mother satisfied, and more than satisfied. No! What I was thinking of, at the moment, is one of those dreadful complications that make life so sad—and cannot be remedied."

"But what is it?" said Hubert, his breath becoming short and troubled. "I have no idea what you allude to."

"I know you have not, and you had better not. It was wrong of me to say what I did. Ifs and ands are of no use in the face of a *fait accompli*, and may even be cruel."

"Whatever they may be, you have said enough to show that I ought to know and must know what it is."

"Believe me, you had better not. Don't make me feel that I have brought disenchant—I mean, that it really is wiser sometimes to take things as one finds them, and not run to meet disappoint-

ments halfway, that might never come in one's way. Take my advice, and be satisfied with the happiness you have, and don't spoil it by wanting too much. Keep the romance of life as long as you can, and the bloom that never returns when it has once been rubbed off. I had it once, and lost it long ago. I would have kept it, if I could : you can keep it, if you are wise."

Her voice trembled for an instant. She had forgotten her object in the remembrance of capabilities unfilled and aspirations extinguished. Hubert recalled her to it by again insisting on an answer. He had better not have done so, but of course he did. She roused herself quickly from the short dream of unrealised possibilities, and said, "If you *will* make me speak, I can't help it; but I advise you again not to press the subject."

"You should have thought of that before," answered Hubert, forced into unnatural bluntness by an impulse of simplicity. He felt as if some evil were about to happen, that would not have happened if he had been absent, and yet ought to happen because he was there.

"You had better think again," said Lady Dytchley, "and measure your strength before you oblige me to say what will give you great and unnecessary pain."

"Every word you say shows me more and more that I must hear it. Please don't keep me any longer in suspense."

"Very well then—but I call you to witness that you have brought it on yourself."

"I call myself to witness that I did not," *thought* Hubert, putting himself into an attitude

of imperious attention modified by anxiety. She remained emphatically silent for a few moments, and then began to speak again in a depressed voice, that vibrated under protest like a muffled bell.

"Then if you insist on my telling you," she said—"if you *must* be told, after my begging you so earnestly not to take advantage of my words, the truth is this: Everard will die, if he goes on as he is at present, not really of heart complaint, as they say, but because the means of curing him are not available. I know the strength of his constitution and the strength of his feelings, and I know that one thing could save his life, and one only—and that would be, to find in reality what he fancied and dreamt of and believed in and lived on in poor dear Ida. He felt as if it were a reality, because he had grown up with the idea of its being so; and he is so conscientious and so full of feeling, that his imagination supplied what was wanting. I always said that their growing up under the idea of being engaged was a fatal deception and mistake. The event has proved that I was right. Her marrying as she did, in spite of all I could say, shows that they never were really suited for each other, and that she never cared for him as he deserved, but only by the force of habit. Now I know who is the very one to make him happy, who is, and always was, exactly suited for him in every way, and would have—but that is impossible now. Don't oblige me to go on."

"You *must* go on," said Hubert in a hoarse voice. "'Would have'—what?"

"Would have cared for him fearfully, if she could have allowed herself to do so. If nothing else had shown it, her inconsolable grief when he was in Rome so dangerously ill"—

"Tell me her name, and let me go," interrupted Hubert.

"Elfrida, if you—*will* hear it. The thing was evident, and only confirmed what they had both shown, without knowing it, at Netherwood last autumn, when they took such delight in each other's society that they were always together. She told me that herself. Neither of them knew what it meant, because both are too conscientious to have allowed such an idea; but they might and would have known it now, if circumstances had not prevented them. You see, the end came so suddenly, that she had no time to realise the barrier between him and Ida. If she had remained free long enough for them to have been thrown together at Netherwood and at Freville Chase, under their altered circumstances, there can be no doubt as to what would have been: but you proposed, she found you more like him than anyone she ever knew, and she accepted you. They are neither of them free now. I entreated Sir Richard not to let the marriage be so very soon. For your own sake, it would have been better to wait and see how far she and you might be able to know your own minds. But she would have it, and so you will marry without having the means of knowing the most important thing of all. He would listen to nothing. He has told everybody that the marriage *will* be on the first of May, and so I can only hope

that things may turn out better than I can see any reason to expect. I mean, of course, as regards yourselves. For Everard there is no hope. You had better not have insisted on my telling you this. You might never have known or suspected that you were not the one person in the world made for her. Try to think that you are."

Hubert had become unnaturally calm, like a cloud charged with electricity. "Thank you for the advice," he said. "But do you suppose that I would consent to victimise her and murder my best friend, for the avowed purpose of deceiving myself? You have told me things that I was not aware of. I am obliged to assume that you believe what you have told me; but I am no less bound to assure myself that it is, or is not. I am now going—I don't know where, nor for how long. If I live to return, I shall make myself sure, one way or the other. I am not doubting your word: I only say that I shall do what I am bound to do. You ought to have told me long ago. You might have told me at once what you meant, I think, and not have tortured me by degrees. I don't say 'good-bye;' for it either means nothing, which I never mean, or something that I cannot at present feel."

He turned away, not hurriedly, but with a decision that left no opening. Lady Dytechley remained a long while where she stood when he left her. She had succeeded, but not triumphed, gained her point, but not insured the result. What if Hubert should put off his quest a few days, return to Freville Chase at once, and offer to release Elfrida from her engagement? Heroic

and impetuous, he was likely to do so. And what then? This view of the case took immediate effect on the roots of her hair, causing them to feel hot and pointed. She began to examine the foundations of her statement, but found nothing more than a strong desire to believe it and a large amount of dissolving self-confidence. Mixed motives had guided her opposition to Everard: mixed motives had made her his unbidden advocate against Hubert: mixed motives were the cause of her alarm now. By wishing against Everard's engagement to Ida she had made herself half believe against it, and by wishing against Hubert's engagement to Elfrida she had almost persuaded herself that she was trying to make an act of restitution to Everard. In both cases worldliness directed, and habitual self-deception coloured the object, in accordance with her wish.

With regard to the first, her mistake had proved itself on more principles than one. The second was on its trial. If Hubert would only take her word for the fact, and keep out of the way delicately, like a proper hero of a sentimental story brought out in numbers, all would go "merry as a marriage bell," and everyone live happily ever after; but if he should happen to make his act of heroism short, sharp and decisive, as befitted his character—oh!

It happened that he did not. He hurried along the Rue de Rivoli into the Place de la Concorde, and turning down to the banks of the Seine, spoke to himself silently.

"If I were not a Catholic," he thought, "if I

had not known the true Faith and the Sacraments, I should wish to drown myself in the depths of that water, and feed the fishes, or be picked out and put into the Morgue, if it still exists, to be stared at by travellers among other known and unknown specimens of wearied-out humanity, and perhaps turned into the sentimental hero of a bad novel by some imitator of Eugene Sue. From my birth I have been in every one's way, and the means of misfortune or the cause of sin. I was the cause of hatred and crime in my step-mother, unless that story of my birth is a fabrication, like the first. I was the cause of criminal deception in one of the two nurses, and of culpable consent in the other. If I am what they now say I am, I deprived my father of his eldest son by the fact of being so, and, in any case, I have unwillingly been an impersonated lie most of my life, a scandal and a detected imposture to the man who had been like the best of fathers to me. Heavy blows indeed, but not crushing, though they fell on me at the worst moment. I had yet to learn that I had been beforehand the enemy of my best friend, his rival since, bringing misery on him and preventing its removal. If I had not cut out Everard by being palmed off as Lord de Freville's heir, he would have married Ida and been happy; for her mother would no more have seen that they were unsuited than he would have found it so. I stood in the way, and his hopes were blighted, his life nearly sacrificed, his race nearly blotted out. He had yet another chance. There was one who might then have saved him, and would. I stood in his way again, without knowing it,

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and now there is only one way to retrieve the ruin I have caused by existing. I must give up all. Give up? I have nothing to give. She is not mine, except in words uttered without knowledge of her own heart. I have to accept the loss of what never really existed, go far away, without any ostensible limit of time or place, and write something (I know not what) to say what I mean. Write something! To whom? Not to Everard, who would disbelieve the fact, refuse what is his to take, not mine to offer, and lose what would save, not only him, but with him, all he so nobly represents. I must write to *her*, and say—what? Must I lie by implication, that truth may be free? I must, or the act will be but a mockery. I must tear my heart out, and smile as if doing so were a relief. It must be written when I am far away—I shall soon be far away. But for the Faith, I should read in the story of my life a dark, inexorable fate, instead of God's divine will and infinite wisdom. The guilt that surrounded me at the beginning, the prosperity that followed, and the vicarious retribution closing around me now, are like the plot of an old Greek tragedy without the bloodshed and the unities. But what am I doing here, walking about and speaking to myself, like an actor on the stage? I have to go, and then to say why, without telling the truth, and then—to mourn what was never mine, and knowing that it never was, feel its loss as if it had most really been. I have no right anywhere, no right even to the name by which I am called; yet I must return hereafter to Freville Chase, and see her there as the wife of my

best friend, and endorsing the bond with my will, reproach myself in conscience for not being able to forget. Miserable whining! Have I no power to silence this wretched lamentation, and tear myself away from clinging to a shadow? Can't I fix my mind, for a while at least, on the fact that I have to get my luggage and go? What have I done with it? I forgot the fiacre waiting at the door."

He turned back to look for it, and found that the driver had followed him, gesticulating at intervals, to attract his attention.

Two hours afterwards he left Paris for Marseilles, meaning to go by sea to Naples, and thence to the place from which the woman of the middling countenance had written or been supposed to write. A dark man followed him into the railway carriage, and sitting opposite, looked at him from time to time as if accidentally, but never spoke. Hubert, not wishing to talk, changed his position, and soon forgot why he had done so.

When sorrow has taken possession of the heart thoughts become emphasised in one, and time passes like an unbroken shadow. He left the train, feeling that he had come from Paris and was at Marseilles. The interval was a blank. He had to wait till the next day for the steamboat, and that time also went by without measure.

The man who had looked at him in the railway carriage stopped at the same hotel, left at the same time, and went to the same steamer. Hubert noticed him, but took no heed. As he was about to step on board, a man came forward through the

crowd that stood round, and calling him by name, put a letter into his hand.

It was the well-remembered John, who had just arrived from Freville Chase in search of him, and stood by the steamer, in hopes of catching him as he embarked. The letter was from Dr. Ranston, and evidently written in extreme haste. There was no date and no definite beginning, but a long blot, with traces of an illegible word or two, and then what follows:—

"I find Lord de Freville so much worse on your account, that I must beg you, as you value his life, to return as quickly as possible and telegraph to me that you are coming. He has taken it into his head that you are being decoyed into some danger—I need not say by whom—and he is so excited in consequence that I can do nothing with or for him. When I came here just now I found him on the point of going after you, and had much difficulty in persuading him to send John instead. I am very sorry to impede you in the important business you are on the way to do: but really it is a matter of life and death. I can see no possible danger for you, but he does, and I am simply powerless to do anything for him till he hears that you are safe and on your way home. Please telegraph without delay that you are starting homewards."

At the first words Hubert had put his hand on the luggage and hailed a fiacre. The rest he read on his way to the station, where he at once telegraphed that he was on his way back.

While strolling about, waiting for the train, and beginning to understand that he had to do with a

question of fact, in which the evidence of memory and perception was against Lady Dytchley, he saw the dark man again.

"That fellow has been dogging me," he said to himself. "It never struck me till now; but he has. I suspect that Everard is right and the Doctor wrong. But what on earth can it mean?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the faithful John, walking up quickly; "but that ragamuffin is up to something. He was at it down there by the steamer, and he came off directly we went. I heard his lordship say to Dr. Ranston that he is sure there is something up against you. If you don't mind it sir, I should like to get into the same carriage; because such as he wouldn't be particular about trying it on with chloroform or something, and he wouldn't tackle two at once like that."

But the dark man appeared to avoid them, and was presently seen walking away, apparently in haste.

"*'Abiit, excessit, evasit, erupit,'*" muttered Hubert. "This puzzle is unpleasantly suggestive."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE electric telegraph, which made war between France and Prussia, brought peace to Freville Chase.

On the day when Hubert was expected to return, and not long before the hour, Dr. Ranston came into the gallery with a small book in his hand.

"Fancy my having forgotten to give you this!" he said. "But you really flabbergasted me so, as soon as I came into the house, that everything else went out of my head. Here is the journal I spoke of, with the account of what happened at Alassio. I am afraid that the writing is not very legible."

"Suppose you read it out then," said Everard. "Never mind Elfrida. She knows all about it, and the more she knows the better. Hubert will be here presently, if the train is not late. Perhaps we shall make something of it among us, though I hardly expect that we shall now."

"Well, then," said the doctor. "On the morning of the 21st of March 1856 . . . I was travelling with an invalid by slow stages to Naples, and, going along the *riviera*, we baited at Alassio and had luncheon. I have never been there since; but I remember it well, lying at the base of a steep and wonderfully picturesque descent, with the blue Mediterranean on the right—I don't

know what depth below. I can see the hotel now, evidently an old palace, and the big room with decorated walls, where we had luncheon. There is a lot written about it, I see ; for I had nothing else to do at the time. Well, here is what it says about the certificate :

“ ‘ March 21, continued.—Just as we had finished luncheon a card was brought to me from an Italian doctor, asking me to come and see an English child whom he was attending in the hotel, and whom he considered to be dying. I went and saw a child of about three years old, with flaxen curls and light blue eyes. He was evidently dying, and he died whilst I was in the room. There was a fair, fat English nurse, who seemed in great distress, and an Italian nursery maid, who made a great noise—rather too much to be credible. The English nurse asked me if I would certify the cause of death, as my certificate would be more satisfactory than that of a foreigner unknown in England. I did so, and we left Alassio about two o’clock.’ ”

“It was in the spring of that year that my brother was taken to Italy,” said Everard : “but the entry in your journal seems to point, not to him, but to the child sent home to Lord de Freville by the two nurses. And yet yours was the certificate sent to Sir Richard.”

“It makes a very curious puzzle to be found out,” said Elfrida. “The two Hubert Frevilles, dying at the same place, and, I suppose, about the same time, sounded strangely enough ; but as for both having the same coloured hair and eyes, when one of them was your brother—it is too much to believe.”

"The landlady at Lyneham mentioned nothing in her evidence about an English doctor being called in," said Everard.

"No, but she mentions the Italian doctor, and she mentions a certificate, and its having been sold, it was supposed, to a stranger. It gives me a dreadful suspicion—too horrible"—

Everard had become very pale, his mouth was compressed, and his eyes looked out fixedly, but not at anything visible. "What is it you suspect?" he said.

"Well, nothing really," she answered, wishing that she had not spoken. "We have Dr. Ranston's word in the one case. However puzzling the thing seems, his journal *must* refer to your brother. And we have clear evidence in the other case."

"No, no. That won't do, and you know it won't. You say so on my account, out of kindness; but the question is too serious to be pushed off. Besides, I have a suspicion myself—the same as yours, I feel sure. What is it you suspect?"

"That the child who died—Lord de Freville's nephew, was made to pass as your brother"—

"Yes—for the purpose of sending us a certificate of my brother's death. Now that could not have been done, if my brother had died by fair means. The people about here have been right by instinct. Inconceivably horrible! horrible in itself and in its consequences. Subject to the will of God, I could wish to die before I am forced into the necessity of bringing this to light. Was there no one to do it but me—no time but *since*— We must see Charlotte Wilcox at once,

She came back yesterday. If I had only listened to her long ago, perhaps I should not be as I am. One should never pooh-pooh anything. Elfrida, you can bring her here quietly, if you will get hold of Mrs. Roland, on some pretence, and tell her what is wanted."

Elfrida left the room, and returned quickly, saying that Charlotte Wilcox would come in a few minutes.

"Here is another entry about it in the journal, I see," said Dr. Ranston, "dated a fortnight later."

"*'Hotel, * * * Florence. A young Italian, the Marquis Moncalvo, called to-day, to thank me for attending his nephew who died at Alassio. He showed much feeling when he spoke of his sister, also dead, the mother of the child. I asked him about the nurse, because I wanted that sort of person for a lady then staying at Florence. He said that the shock of the child's death had quite upset her nervous system, and made her unfit for any service at present. I was surprised, for the woman I saw had nothing nervous about her. She was a fat, comfortable-looking woman, who would relieve her feelings by crying quietly, and would have done very well for what I wanted. I proposed seeing her, telling him that I had turned my attention a good deal to nervous disorders. He looked, I thought, rather confused, and said that she had gone to England. As that was a valid reason for not seeing her, I said no more; but I wondered why he had not said so at once. He then, very unnecessarily, thanked me again, and went away.'*"

"One thing is clear," said Everard, "the woman you saw was not Charlotte Wilcox, my little brother's nurse, but the present landlady of the White Hart, who had charge of the other Hubert Freville. Now which of the two children did you see? and what became of the one whose death you did not certify? The child who died must, I think, have been Lord de Freville's nephew: for your description agrees with the completed evidence we have of what he was like, and not at all with what my brother was likely to be. I have not asked Mrs. Roland about that; but we shall have it presently from Charlotte Wilcox."

"It seems to me but too plain," said Elfrida. "His taking the trouble to find out Dr. Ranston at Florence, to call and thank him, shows that he had reasons for wanting the certificate; and his passing off one nurse for another, and one child for another, shows what those reasons were."

"Then what did he do with my brother?"

"What indeed? I had rather not think what."

"But I *must* think of it, and (worst of all) go through with it. They have forced it on me, among them. One thing has led to another, and brought this out at last. I dread hearing what Charlotte Wilcox will say—and here she is—but there is no help for it."

She came as far as the door, caught sight of Dr. Ranston, and stood still.

"I see," said Everard, "that you have guessed what I wanted you for."

"Yes, my lord, I did," she said, looking significantly towards the doctor.

"But you are afraid of speaking before Dr. Ranston. He knows all about it, or at least as much as I do. Tell me, if you please, all you know about my brother's death."

"Well, my lord, I am sure no one knows as much about it as I do, except those that wouldn't like to tell. I remember everything that happened then, just as if I saw it all before me at this moment; and I remember what happened before, just before—not that anything did happen, but only the feeling that came over me, and turned out to be too true. I can't tell what put it into my head, for he had been very kind and pleasant, but as we came down that steep hill into the town (Alassio, I mean) I couldn't help thinking how lonely it was, travelling so far from home, and with a stranger as you may say, and the dear child without father or mother, and no English person with him but me. I looked out at the horses, trotting as hard as they could go, and turning the corners, with nothing but a stone here and there at the edge, and the rocks going right down to the sea. We went so near the edge once, I thought we were going over; and then, as he was playing with the child, it came into my head how easily he could let him down, and nobody but me to say it wasn't an accident, which of course wouldn't be credited, with no other witness."

"What made you think of that?" said Everard. "Had he given you any reason to mistrust him?"

"No, my lord, I can't say he had. It was a kind of a feeling, and true enough it turned out,

only not in that way. The sun had been hot, and I was heated with running about to get off from San Remo; for we had come away in a hurry at the last. And then it grew chilly towards the evening, and we didn't get in till late, quite dark it was, and an open carriage, with the things in another behind. I felt very chilly, and ill all over, and I got so bad that I was obliged to go to bed. I got worse, and had a bad feverish attack, and was light-headed, so that I didn't know what was going on; but as soon as I came to myself (that was five days after) I crept out of bed and called outside the door for somebody, to know who was taking care of the child, and how he was. A woman came and said he had been taken very ill. 'Where is he?' I said. She said, 'In a room at the end of that corridor; but don't go in.' I said, 'Why?' but she only put up her shoulders and went off. I felt sure then he was dead, and I went straight into the room as soon as she was gone. I never shall forget it, not if I was to live to a hundred. There was a little coffin on the bed, and candles burning. I thought I should have dropped, and I don't know, I am sure, how I got across the room; but I did, and then I saw that it wasn't him. It was a child of the same age, but with very light hair, not at all like him. I thought of the feeling I had, coming down the hill, and said to myself, 'He has murdered him, as sure as possible, to get the money that's to come to him.' I thought I should have gone mad, to think of the poor dear innocent child, and an orphan too, being made away with by those that ought to have protected him.

I dressed myself, ill as I was, and went and taxed the Marquis with it to his face; and I told him he had given me something to make me ill, so that I should be out of the way—but that couldn't be, because I had felt it coming on after the chill. He never put himself out, but only said, 'She is still delirious, I see,' and called a chambermaid (the same that I had spoken to just before) to take care of me. But I said, 'What has become of him? That child who lies dead, with the candles burning, isn't him, and you know he isn't.' He said, 'I will talk to you as much as you like about it, when you are better' (but he never did), and shut the door. It gave me such a turn to see how it was, and not knowing what to do, that I was taken worse, and wasn't out of danger for some days. All this time I didn't know what I was doing, and no doubt I talked about it all while I was light-headed, for I heard them speak about me when they thought I wasn't myself; but I was sensible then, and I had picked up enough of the language here, from that wicked servant of his—who, it's my belief, was at the bottom of it—to make out what they said. I heard them say that I had gone off my head about the child's death, and was to be taken care of. I opened my eyes and told them I must see the Marquis. They stared to find that I was right in my head, and said he had gone away. 'How am I to get home?' I said; and I made them understand that I should write and expose him if he didn't come soon, or send some one to see after me. I don't know whether they let him know or not; but four days after, he sent that good-for-nothing servant

of his to say that he couldn't come, but had got me a very good place with his aunt. I said, 'I don't want to stay in Italy. I want to go home.' He said he was sorry, but couldn't help it, as he hadn't money enough with him to take me home, because his master expected to see me first. I had a hard matter to keep my tongue quiet, but I was driven into a corner, as you may say, and had to go. When we got to Florence he took me where I expected to find the Marquis; but they said it was where his aunt lived, the same that was staying at Freville Chase"——

"Yes; I can just remember her," said Everard. "She was a very good woman."

"The best I ever knew, my lord. I lived with her over seventeen years. I feel sure she was afraid there was something wrong, though she never said a word about it. I saw him afterwards, and he spoke very kindly, and made me a very handsome present, 'for the care I had taken of his nephew,' he said. I did long to throw it at him, only she was in the room. I often thought of going home; but then what could I have done, with no one but myself to speak, and him and his servant to swear against me? So I stayed with her till she died, and I don't know that I should have come home then, if I hadn't been afraid of him. But, just after the funeral, I heard the servant tell somebody that I was wrong in the head, and ought to be looked after. I knew from that what his master was up to again, and as I had let things out to one or two people who might tell again, I was afraid of being made out mad for saying what nobody would have believed. So I

slipped off and came to England. But, just after I got home, who should I see but that villain Giacomo, creeping about disguised, just as he was afterwards in the lane."

"You are sure it was the same man?" said Elfrida.

"Yes, miss, I could swear to him. I suppose you heard what he did afterwards. If it hadn't been for my lord"——

"He wrote me word," said Everard, "that it was his servant who made the attempt in the lane, and said the man had done it on his own account. But when and where did you see him first?"

"Just out of Chase End, my lord, on the Lyneham road. It was the middle of last March. It gave me such a turn, knowing what he was and what he was afraid I should tell, that I ran home, and kept in all day till it got dusk, and then I put on a thick veil, and went down the Exbourne road, and up here through the Chase. I was too frightened to think what I was doing, but went right into the house just before they locked up,—of course I knew every hole and corner of it—and got into the tower. I hid there all night; but you were travelling abroad, my lord, at that time, and so I went off by daylight. I hung about the Chase till it was light, and then I walked on to the station, and took the first train to Lyneham. I had meant to go to Sir Richard and ask to be protected against him; but I was afraid of her ladyship, and coming off in that way without my things (for of course I hadn't said where I was going) I had left my money behind,

all but a shilling or two. There I was, without money, and nobody to speak for me, and nothing but the clothes I stood in. I didn't know what in the world to do, for I couldn't write home to get my things without my stepmother and the second family letting out where I was. The only thing I could think of was to apply to Sir Roger, as the last resource, because I could walk to Bramscote. So I set off as fast as I could walk; but I didn't know my way, and was afraid to ask, for fear of being traced. I wandered about, hour after hour, on a bitter cold day, without food, till I thought I should have to lie down and die in one of those lonely lanes. At last I came to a house at the corner of four roads, and sat down on the step, because I couldn't walk any farther. I was perished with the cold, after being so long in Italy, and felt so faint that I could hardly see. I think I should have died then, only Mrs. Atherstone drove up to the door and took me in. It was very hard to deceive her by giving a false name, when she was so very kind, and did what no one could have been expected to do for a person she knew nothing of, and kept me there four months, and would have gone on, if I could have stayed. She only came there now and then, and I was expecting her again, and meant to tell her the truth and ask her advice, when I saw him—Giacomo—one day from the window, and he saw me. It was the beginning of August. That afternoon I slipped off unobserved and walked all the way here. I waited about in the Chase till dark, and then walked up to the house. I had got so that I

didn't care what I did, but went right in again by the offices and up the back stairs. I heard one of them lock the door just after, and say, 'who was it that came in just now?' But I was out of sight then, and I ran up the back stairs and on to the tower, and hid myself till Mrs. Roland came to look around. I told her all, and begged hard to be allowed for charity to stay there till she could find a chance of getting me a situation right away. I remembered what you were, my lord, when you were only seven years old, and I felt sure you would give me shelter; but I had been so shaken by all I had gone through, I couldn't bear to think of any one knowing about me just then but her, and I begged her to say nothing for a few days. And then the Marquis came on a visit here, and that put me about dreadfully, and I begged her to wait till he was out of the country. And then, the very day he went"——

"Yes, I found you there," said Everard. "You were quite unnerved, and no wonder. She told me all about it just afterwards. She acted wisely, as she always does. It would have been very awkward for me to have known it while he was in the house. I wonder how the man found out afterwards where you went to."

"From my father's second wife, my lord. I know the Marquis went round by Chase End, the morning he went away, and called at the shop, and spoke to her. I knew that from those who saw him."

"Clearly there was something serious to conceal," thought Everard, "or such very strong

measures would not have been taken. It looks worse and worse."

"You are sure that the child you saw in the coffin had flaxen ringlets?" he said.

"Not ringlets, my lord; the hair was flaxen, but cut short, so that I could only just see it, covered as the head was. Did any one see him with ringlets?"

"Yes—Dr. Ranston, unless there were two children with flaxen hair."

"They were up to cutting them' off, so as they might keep the hair out of sight, if they had any object in it," remarked Charlotte Wilcox, addressing no one in particular.

"Which there certainly would be," said Elfrida, "if they wanted to make out that he was your brother."

"Do you remember the dates?"

"We came there on the 21st of March, between six and seven in the evening," answered Charlotte Wilcox. "It was on my birthday, which is the 21st."

"I wrote the certificate five hours before," said Dr. Ranston, looking at his journal.

"Then that conclusively proves that the child whose death you certified was not my brother," said Everard, "and as to how your certificate came into our hands, I leave you to guess. The landlady says, in the evidence you read last week, that she missed the certificate, that she asked the other woman what had become of it, and that the woman said she had sold it for an English sovereign."

"It was he that paid it then," said Charlotte Wilcox; "for he brought some with him."

"One more question," said Everard. "Was my brother fair? I cannot distinctly remember."

"No, my lord. He had black eyes and hair. I had a photograph of him, done in Paris, but it was stolen off my table at Alassio by some of them—the same, I suppose, that sold the certificate."

Everard rose from his chair, and walking a few paces away, stood still.

"What is it?" said Elfrida. "Does anything strike you?"

"Yes—but it may be nothing—I daresay it *is* nothing."

He was much excited, and spoke with a nervous energy that bordered on impatience.

"Tell me one thing more," he said, turning suddenly and addressing Charlotte Wilcox. "If he were alive now—I don't mean that he *is* alive, or likely to be—but suppose he were, and suppose you met him by chance. Do you think you would be able to know him again, at this distance of time, changed as he must be?"

"I think I should, my lord; for his features were more formed than children's generally are. But there is no chance of that. He was made away with by some of them, as sure as I am standing here."

Everard made no reply, but presently looked at his watch, listened as if expecting to hear some sort of sound, and went out of the room, leaving the door open. The distant echo of the great door bell was heard as he passed out, and at the same moment, or rather before, Elfrida changed colour perceptibly. In another minute he returned, and Hubert was with him.

Charlotte Wilcox, having told all she had to tell, and answered all the questions that Everard had to ask, prepared to leave the room on his return. She curtsied as he came in, and was beginning to back out, when he said :

"Wait a moment. Did you ever see *him* before?"

She looked up, grew pale by degrees, and trembled violently.

"It's your brother, my lord," she said. "I can swear to him against all the world. Whatever could they have done to him?"

"Passed him off of course as the other Hubert Freville, who had flaxen hair and light blue eyes and died at Alassio. The two nurses who had charge of that child have confessed and sworn that they got another instead of him, and the only doubt was, 'Who could that other be?' You and Dr. Ranston's journal have shown who it was."

"I am ready to take my oath of it before any court in the world," she said. "But that isn't all. He ought to have a little scar on the right side of his head, above the ear, where it was cut open against the edge of a carved footstool in this very room. Mrs. Roland remembers its happening, for she was talking to me about it yesterday evening. And she said how like Mr. Freville was to your lordship, and that she should have said he must be him now, only we knew by the certificate he was dead. He wasn't two years old, but the hair never grew. You could always see the place, if you looked for it; and the doctor said it would never come there again."

Everard had in the meantime sent for Mrs. Roland, and she now came in.

"You remember Master Hubert cutting his head open against the footstool?" said Charlotte Wilcox.

"Yes I do—very well," answered Mrs. Roland, scrutinising Hubert's face closely.

"And suppose you found the scar *there*?"

"Suppose we look for it?" said Dr. Ranston. "And, as I am a doctor," he added, inserting his fingers between the hair of Hubert's head, above the right ear, "and ought to know something about scars, I will be the examiner. Here it is, when you push the hair aside—a little bald place in a semicircle. Look, Mrs. Roland. Do you know it?"

"I do, sir, and I can show you how it was made."

She went to the middle of the room, brought back a carved footstool and held it up.

"You see, sir," she said, "this part is just the shape and size of the scar. He fell against this bit, and you find it discoloured all round, where the oak and the crimson satin was stained with blood. I always saw he was like my lord; but then I couldn't go against the certificate."

Everard drew her on one side and in a few words, explained the case.

"Dear me!" she said. "That accounts indeed for a great deal. It always puzzled me to think what that ill-looking woman came here for, last October, and went off grumbling in her own language."

"I only wish she were here now," thought Everard. "I might put her upon tracing out the lost photograph for me."

"I wonder what that landlady has come for," said she, "and brought old Susan with her again."

"Is she here? Then do bring her in at once. I want to see her."

Off went Mrs. Roland. There was a pause in the proceedings, and Hubert felt himself free to claim his own subjectivity.

"One hears of people gaining a loss," he said, "but I have gained by losing. I can hardly realise the truth yet, hardly believe in myself. If I seem cold (and I feel that I do) that is the reason."

"We are all pretty much in the same way about that, I think," said Dr. Ranston, turning to Elfrida. "I had half a mind to feel my own pulse just now, to see whether I could believe my own ears and eyes; for the truth seemed so much too good to be true. And yet I always saw a likeness between them. It was that likeness which made me speak to him as a stranger in Rome, when I heard him inquiring for some lost friend or relation, and guessed it might be the man I had met in the train. The likeness was providential then: otherwise Lord de Freville would never have been traced at all, or not until it was too late."

"I always thought they were wonderfully alike," said Elfrida, "though the colouring is different; but—I don't know why—the likeness never was so evident as just now, when they came into the room together."

"He has developed somehow or other since he went away," thought Dr. Ranston. "That is why. If the time had not been so short, I should think he had gone through some sort of practical schooling."

He had indeed, and it was going on still ; but, unlike himself, he showed no sign of what was within him.

Mrs. Roland now reappeared, followed by old Susan and the landlady of the White Hart. As soon as they had deployed into line, old Susan came to the front and spoke.

"Please, my lord," she said, "my niece had to come and give a message from that nasty creature, and was that put about, because it's no doubt all a pretence as it couldn't be done, there was no doing nothing with her. And so I says (for I come with the carrier this morning to see how she was)—I says, 'I'll take and go with you myself. I know his lordship won't mind—but he *must* be told, so as he can take the law on her, if she's up to her games.'"

"Thank you, Susan," said Everard. "Is she in Lyneham or where she can be found?"

"No, my lord," said the landlady; "but she is coming in a few days. All she told me in the letter was, that she can't get at what is wanted, but sends this parcel, and will explain, when she comes, what the meaning of it is."

Everard opened the parcel, and light came into his eyes. "It explains itself," he said. "Here is the lost photograph, with 'C. W.' at the back. Tell her that she shall be well paid for this. She is as bad a lot as I ever had to deal with—don't tell her that—but she has done, for her own advantage, all I could have wanted. The cock-and-bull story of an Italian prince and a stepmother was got up by some one—it doesn't signify who."

"I don't think, my lord, she had anything to do with that; for she was in a great way at not being able to find out who he was, and kept on complaining that her cousin had been taken in about it by the man she was engaged to."

"Very likely. Well the child that was changed"——

"I beg your pardon, my lord, but I haven't told you what she said in her letter. She said that she had found her cousin at last, but that she was unable to tell her anything about it, and could not even tell where the man she had been engaged to was gone, as she had never seen him since. And then she remembered her cousin giving her this photograph at the time, when she first proposed to change the children, in order to show her what a beauty he was. So she went back to her own home to look for it, thinking there might be some name on the back that would help her to trace who the child had belonged to. She found the portrait in an old trunk. But there was 'C. W.' on it."

"Exactly," said Everard. "Here is the owner of it, Charlotte Wilcox. It is the photograph of my brother. There he is, and here is his photograph."

"Well, to be sure!" exclaimed Susan. "It's him, as plain as can be."

"Is that the likeness of your brother, my lord," said the landlady, "him that we thought was dead?"

"Yes. Here is his nurse, who can swear to it."

"That I can," said Charlotte Wilcox, as he handed the photograph to her.

"Why, lor! if it ain't Miss Davies—Well, I

never!" interrupted Susan. "Whatever was you a-thinking of, to run off like that? You needn't have been afraid of the ragamuffin, though Muggles had ought to have took him up. He went about his business pretty quick when I showed him the old blunderbuss."

"You shall hear all about that, Susan, before you go," said Mrs. Roland, looking at the photograph. "This is exactly Master Hubert, as he was at three years old."

"And is distinctly like him now," said Dr. Ranston. "The features there are extraordinarily marked for those of a child, and they are very little altered, considering the difference of age."

"It's just like what he was when he was taken abroad," remarked Mrs. Roland, addressing no one in particular.

The landlady, having fulfilled the end of her visit, began to go away.

"Do you remember me?" said Dr. Ranston, as she sidled past him.

"Yes, sir, indeed I do," said she, turning very red. "It isn't likely I should forget that day, with all that's come of it."

"I'm sure you won't, Eliza, to your dying day," chimed in old Susan.

"That will do," added Mrs. Roland, leading the way out.

Sir Richard, who had ridden to Netherwood, was expected about this time, and Elfrida, wishing to spare Everard any further explanations, went out to meet him. Dr. Ranston had letters to write, and went to write them. Everard and Hubert remained in the gallery.

"There is no measuring the length and breadth and depth of one's own deficiencies, anyhow," said Everard, throwing himself back in an arm-chair. "It really is unaccountable that I should never have suspected the truth till it was forced on my attention, by what Charlotte Wilcox told me just before you came. I suppose the grumbling old dictum, 'too good to be true,' was at the bottom of it, hidden up among other unrecognised fallacies."

"And yet you were the first to see it, and to put two and two together," said Hubert, "and you always would have it that I was a Freville, in spite of everything and everybody. It was, of course, the existence of the certificate that put you off the scent, as it did every one else. If you come to ask, Why did nobody suspect the truth—why didn't I, when I was puzzling myself over dim recollections of this house?"

"How was it you didn't mention them?"

"Because they were so misty they didn't seem real."

"Well, I suppose we were not meant to see it before it was made clear. The sun burst out all at once, and brought the greatest possible good, of its kind, that could come to me, out of this greatest evil. I had a bad time of it after you went; for there came another letter the next day from a different place."

"From the Italian woman? Well, I was going to say that I examined mine after I began to suspect, and found no Calabrian postmark at all. You were right, and Ranston was wrong. Of course you were, and you saved me, just in



time, from I don't know what. I was stepping on board the steamer at Marseilles when John caught me up. There was a fellow dogging me all the way from Paris to Marseilles, and from the hotel there to the steamer, and from the steamer back to the station. I can see who sent him, and why. It had been discovered who I was not, and by the help of Charlotte Wilcox, there was every chance of my discovering who I was. It was time for him to do something; and his antecedents tell one what he was likely to do."

"Did you see Lady Dytechley in Paris?" said Everard.

"Yes. Do you think she had anything to do with sending the man to dog me?" answered Hubert.

"Not directly, I suppose; but I don't know. What made you ask the question? Did she say anything that would lead you to infer it?"

"Not at all. She was very open in her manner."

"Then what put it into your head to ask the question?"

"Well, you know she was against the marriage, when I was supposed to have no name."

"Yes: but how did she show it? What did she say to you? I am sure she said something disagreeable, that you wish to hide from me because it is so. I can see it in your manner and in your way of speaking. You are not as you would naturally be, at such a time as this. There is a constraint about you that you can't shake off, and you have partly infected me. What did she say to you? Out with it now."

"I must entreat you not to press that question," said Hubert solemnly. "I would do anything in the world for you that can be done, and I think you know it: but there are things that can't be repeated."

"I know there are," answered Everard, "and I know that this is not one of them. You don't repeat it, because you think it would be painful for me to hear. But shirking what is before one never answers. I see that I must help you to the answer. Didn't she say something to the effect that Elfrida didn't care about you?"


"Yes, that was it. Now you have heard it, and we can talk of something more agreeable."

"Not yet. There is more behind. You half believed it—didn't you?"

"Well, it wasn't a pleasant idea to carry with me into Calabria," said Hubert, making a desperate effort to look amused.

"It wouldn't have disturbed you, if you hadn't believed it: but you did believe it. I saw there was something wrong, by your manner to Elfrida. I don't think she saw it—luckily for you she went out in a hurry to get the story over with Sir Richard. But she *will* see it if you don't mind, and she is not at all the sort of girl to bear it without an explanation that would be very painful, to say the least, for both of you. The thing must be cleared up now, or you will get into trouble. What did Lady Dytchley say?"

"Well, you know, I can't recollect exactly what she said; but it was just as you supposed. You can imagine how she spoke and how she looked."



"Yes, and I know how she can make herself believe what she happens to wish at the time being. She wanted to break off your marriage—we know why, and she threw it on me, didn't she?—But I know she did. I know her so well. I know how she would make it out to herself, as putting things to rights and making them much better than they would have been. I have told you the upshot of what she said. You must tell me how she put it, and tell it quickly, that I may have done with it."

"It really is done now, through your second sight, or rather second hearing. You expressed the whole thing when you said 'put to rights, and making it much better.'"

"Yes, but how? Why would it be much better, according to her view? I am certain she gave a reason. Did she say anything, for instance, about my rides with Elfrida at Netherwood last autumn? and didn't she lead you to infer that we—don't force me to go on, but tell me the rest."

"I will, then. She said that you had always been suited for each other, that both would have felt it so but for your engagement, that it was the surest means of restoring your health, and that, if I were out of the way, so it would be."

"So she actually went as far as that?"

"She did, and appeared to be firmly convinced of it."


"I daresay. Her power of self-deception is unequalled. And you really believed it?"

"What could I do, after such positive and solemn assurances from a person who had every

means of knowing. I left Paris, meaning to keep away and write afterwards to Elfrida to say why I did so."

"Hubert, you are a noble fellow as ever lived," said Everard, rising to his feet suddenly. "A more heroic effort was never made. But really, if I had not known her so long, and unhappily so well, I should think she had gone out of her senses. I thought I had been sufficiently intelligible to her in the library at Netherwood, when she was trying to show that black was white about going abroad: but it seems not. The habit of drawing on her wishes for her facts must have developed enormously by encouragement from within and from without. A more absurdly improbable idea never was entertained by a sane person. She knew better than anyone how little I saw of Elfrida till then, for she purposely kept her out of my way, on account of my religion. She knew what we were talking about then, for she said so in a letter to Elfrida. She knew that you possess the whole of Elfrida's heart, for Sir Richard told me in Paris that she said so, and that she was then delighted at it, as she will be again. She knew that for Ida I raced like a madman across country, travelled afterwards in thin, icy-damp clothes to Rome, and nearly killed one man, if not two, when I got there. She knew all this, and yet she could talk of a fresh combination, to suit the present state of her game, just as if Elfrida and myself were chessmen on a board. Were it not for her extraordinary power of deceiving herself, I should be obliged to say that a more reckless and cruel falsification

of facts could hardly be conceived. Certainly the consequences might have been ruinous to us all, and would, if Ranston's letter had not caught you at Marseilles. It would have broken up your life and Elfrida's, embittered the last days of mine, and stamped out the race. The time has come for speaking out as I have never spoken before, as I never expected to speak, and as I hope never to speak again. Silence now would have no charity in it, but only humbug. Lady Dytechley had a long interview in Paris with the man who has a vested interest hostile to what Charlotte Wilcox was sure to show sooner or later. She had an interest of her own (as you know) in breaking off your marriage. The next week she worked on your feelings till she made you play into her hands. Will anyone tell me that there was no connection between those two interviews and the man who dogged you from Paris to the steamer at Marseilles, and from the steamer to the station? The thing was managed by hints and complaints. Neither of them meant to do you any harm—that is, as they would make themselves understand the word—but they wanted you out of the way, more out of the way than they could have securely reckoned on your putting yourself. The man Giacomo, who tried to capture Charlotte Wilcox, and squealed when I gave him a good kick for his trouble, was of course the discretionary medium, and the man who dogged you was his agent, who would no doubt have introduced himself plausibly, and misled you half over the world in search of what had no existence. And you would have gone,



for the sake of the excitement and the distraction, in the vain hope of crushing out what you couldn't drive away. But there are things that can't be crushed out; and this is one of them. You would have pressed it down with your will, but the will can't silence the memory; and as the rebellion of memory is liable to be mistaken for a defect in the will, your heroic victory over yourself would have been, to yourself, almost as bad as a defeat by reason of unmanageable scruples. You would have broken your heart over it, without the comfort of being satisfied with what you had done. My own case is simpler, beyond comparison, than yours would have been, for I have only to obey the law of God; and yet I tell you that the struggle with my own nature and with the morbid side of my own conscience has passed all conception. I leave you to judge then what Lady Dytechley would have brought on you, if you had not been stopped in time."

"I said so to myself when I left her," said Hubert. "I have known her ways as long as I have known her. But she had the advantage of me that time; for there was truth and justice in her cause, though she advocated it on false principles."

"Truth based on its own suppression," said Everard, "and justice on wrong. Make every fair excuse for her, but don't forget that black is not white."

"I don't forget it, and I am afraid I make much less allowance than you do. The truth and justice I speak of are in the case itself, not in her use of it."

"In other words, one wrong could be undone by another, that other being intolerable to the person for whose benefit it was done. I see how it is. You still think that, if you had never been, I might have. . . . My dear Hubert, you really are the noblest fellow that I ever knew, or heard of, or imagined. It really is enough to bring tears out of a stone. But you have been deceived, grossly and cruelly, deceived by the old device of setting the heart in opposition to the intelligence and turning a noble nature against itself. I have said enough to convince anyone, however strongly biassed ; but the conjuring trick has taken such firm hold of your imagination that assurances are useless. I must go further. I must probe an ever-open wound, that you may know what is there, and be at peace. What I said about Elfrida, in reference to Lady Dytechley's plan, excludes the idea universally, excludes all women existing and possible. Let no one talk to me of other hopes, of a new beginning. I would not marry now, under any circumstances whatever. I don't mean to imply a principle for others—far from it. My case is altogether exceptional. She was, as it were, made for me, and I for her. Our engagement was a part of our life. We did not begin it, yet it was our own spontaneous act. We made it ours naturally, yet without ever supposing that it might not have been. We were betrayed ; and when she lost confidence in me, it was broken through its own completeness, that offered her all or nothing. It was broken, and my heart has broken with it. When I die, my death will not have been caused by what I went through to

reach her at Rome, but simply by the fact that I saw her there as *his* wife. I have tried to bear it. I have tried to resign myself to it. I have tried to live through it for your sake. But the blow struck home. My life is one of suffering, and must be, while it lasts; yet I pray continually that it may last, if I can only see her return to the Faith. She was robbed of it in her infancy, cheated out of it on the very threshold since, and is, as you well know, in the worst possible position for recovering it. I pray for that, hope for that, suffer for that. I am ready to suffer for it to any extent, with every possible aggravation of bitterness, and for any time. I have said enough, I think, to show that Lady Dytchley's project of restitution is hardly tenable. Are you satisfied now?"

"I am convinced," said Hubert: "but how can I be satisfied after what you have just said? Imagine yourself at the entrance of a fairy palace, with the greatest earthly happiness awaiting you there, yet seeing—not merely your brother, but your dearest friend, starving and perishing in the snow outside. Imagine that, and you will have a very faint idea, a very incomplete symbol of what I feel."

Everard took his arm gently and moved away towards the door.

"That would be the sensational view of it," he said, "but not the true one. We don't see the reason, nor the end, nor the balance of things, nor the consequences growing side by side out of them. We know so little, so very little. Now go to Elfrida. Show yourself to her as you are,

not as what Lady Dytchley would have turned you into. Remember nothing of all that we have said, except that she is yours."

He opened the door decisively, and Hubert went out in search of Elfrida.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

BEFORE ten o'clock in the morning, every old woman in Chase End had heard the news, and made her remarks on the fact. "*Where they do agree, their unanimity is wonderful;*" and it was so then, partly because they knew something of Hubert, and liked what they knew, partly because they knew nothing of the Marquis Moncalvo, and disliked what they imagined. The darkness visible that hung round him enlarged their suspicions; and passing strange were the stories that went forth about him, in connection with the news just heard.

There was rejoicing at Freville Chase, heartfelt, yet subdued, like a toast that is drunk in solemn silence. Mrs. Roland had made known the fact in a parenthetical way to the household, as a thing that must of necessity be, and they felt with her that comments would be out of place; but Anne, the housemaid, was always irrepressible where the Marquis was concerned, and she pursued Mrs. Roland half through the house to have the last word about him.

"Seeing's believing," said she, as if to herself. "I kep' on telling everybody he had ought to be took up—a nasty wicked creature, to go and murder his own sister's child!"

"When the child has grown up to be a man, and you saw him this very morning," remarked Mrs. Roland, retiring with dignity.

"He took and sold him to them as was ready to do it," said Anne, "and it wasn't his fault if they was afraid of being hanged. He'll have to be took up some day—you see if he won't."

"I only wish you'd had the power as well as the will," thought Mrs. Roland, "to have put him under lock and key six months ago."

"I wish Everard had mounted him on Thunderbolt, and got his neck broken," said Sir Richard, at or about the same time to Elfrida, as they were walking in the Chase, a little way from the house. "But it was all my fault, for minding the sparks flying upwards and all that, and never would have come to that, if I had gone to my duties properly and thought of you and Ida. I tell you what it is :—Take warning by me, and never get careless about your religion. But you won't, I know. Pray for me—that's more to the point, for I want it after all the mischief I've done. Now look here! This is what I got this morning from Paris. Not coming home till the end of May—the old story. I don't care. It shall be directly—next week. You can get the toggery afterwards. One of Ida's ball dresses would do to be married in—they're white, you know—and I can get the orange flowers out of the orangery at home. Can't you manage it so?"

"I could very well," said Elfrida, "and would just as soon be married in a ball dress of Ida's as not; but I feel sure that you will not insist on its being hurried over before the time. Most likely

my mother will come back sooner, as circumstances have changed. All will go smoothly when she gets my letter to-morrow; and, if not, the time is not much. I am sure you would not wish me to be married in her absence, for the sake of a month."

"Quite right, quite right," answered Sir Richard. "You've got a wise head. I don't know how I shall get on without you, I'm sure I don't. You see I made such a terrible mess of it before, that I thought I must come out strong. Who can that be, in pink and tops, riding up the avenue? Why, Sherborne coming to call, on his way to Quarry Wood. They meet there to-day."

Sherborne trotted up to them and dismounted. "I heard you were here," he said. "How is he?"

"Do go in and see him," answered Elfrida. "I want to know what you think, and yet I dread hearing it."

"Quite a different man from what he was six weeks ago," interposed Sir Richard, whose depressed optimism was beginning to recover itself. "What do you think he has just found out? Why that Hubert is his brother who died at Alassio eighteen years ago—only he didn't die, but got out of the way, you know."

"I *am* glad to hear that. I don't know when I have heard news that gave me so much pleasure to hear. But how did a child of three years old manage to get out of the way?"

"Well, they did it for him. It was a very awkward business. That fellow, you know—he was his guardian. A bad business as ever was.

I am sure I don't know how it can be kept quiet."

"I will tell you about it before you go," said Elfrida in a low voice: "but you can guess who *he* is."

"Yes, I can. By the by, I met him in London the day before yesterday."

"Where? It might be important to know."

"He was coming out of Claridge's; but whether he was staying there, or calling, I don't know."

"Let me take your horse, and you go in with Elfrida and see him," said Sir Richard.

Sherborne followed Elfrida, who, as they walked slowly up the courtyard, gave a rapid epitome of what had come out through Charlotte Wilcox and the photograph. They found Everard in the gallery.

"I have told him all about it," said Elfrida.

"And better news I never heard," added Sherborne.

"How is Mrs. Atherstone?" said Everard. "I should like so much to see her. Tell her from me that we owe it to her. The woman she saved from perishing with cold and hunger was the same that gave the information. I must ask you to keep the circumstances quiet among yourselves (including Sir Roger, De Beaufoy, and Lady Fyfield) because I want, for evident reasons, to get the matter settled quietly."

"You said last night you wanted to know where *he* is, and Mr. Sherborne saw him in London coming out of Claridge's," said Elfrida to Everard in a low voice.

Sherborne stayed a few minutes, and then went

away. She followed him out of the room and looked up nervously without speaking.

"I think you are a better judge than I can be," said Sherborne, "for you can compare what he is now with what he was a short time ago. Any change for the better, since he came back, must be a good sign; and there has evidently been that, by what he says himself."

"And he *is* a lot better—there's no doubt about it," put in Sir Richard from behind. "So you're off. I hope you will have a good day; but it's a nasty country over there."

"And further than I care to go," answered Sherborne. "I should never have thought of it, only I wanted an excuse for calling here early. He was out riding when I came last."

In the meanwhile Everard had gone into the library, where Dr. Ranston was writing letters.

"I really must go to London now," he said. "You will see that I must, when I tell you why."

"I don't think my vision will extend as far as that," answered Dr. Ranston. "But what is it?"

"It is that I have to settle this business with the author of it, who (I have just heard) is in London. It must be done, or the succession will not be safe; and there are only two ways of doing it. I must either get his acknowledgment of the fraud in some way quietly (the lawyers will know how) or else have a public trial, which, of course, I will not do, if I can avoid it by any lawful means."

"I have been thinking of that," said Dr. Ranston, "and I can only say that, if you will accept my services, I am ready to see him myself. I

must be up in town to-night. You are not fit to go; and if you were, how could you in justice to yourself? I am the man to deal with him, if he should be refractory; for I am able to come down upon him with evidence out of his own mouth. I can say, 'You thanked me for attending your nephew and certifying his death, and I can prove by my own journal and the nurse's evidence that he was alive and well five hours afterwards. My journal proves that the child I attended was fair, and I can prove by the evidence of the same nurse and by a photograph belonging to her that your nephew was dark. Moreover, I have just seen and recognised and been recognised by the woman who was the nurse of the child that really died, and I can produce the Italian woman through whom your servant Giacomo effected the exchange. The one is ready to give her evidence: the other has already done so. Therefore, if you have any regard for your reputation, you will accept the very easy terms that are offered through the generosity of a man whose name I ought not to pollute by pronouncing in your presence. If not, the case will come to a public trial, with what result you know as well as I do!' That will settle him if he is refractory: but he will not attempt it, for he hasn't a leg to stand on."

"You certainly are a friend in need," said Everard. "There is no proportion between this offer of yours and anything I can say to thank you for it. Sherborne told Elfrida just now that he saw him come out of Claridge's, the day before yesterday. I don't know whether he is staying there, or even whether he is still in London."

"I hope he is : but I must find him."

"Yes, but you can't go after him to Paris, where, it seems, he is generally to be found."

"I can and I will too, for your sake, if necessary. But he must come to London, if he is not there. If I can neither find him in London nor in Paris, a judicious letter will bring him. By the by, your lawyer had better be with me. If you will give me a letter to him, I will be at his office to-morrow morning, as soon as it opens, and we can go together."

"I will. But a word first about the terms. You see, Hubert inherited from his mother a considerable sum of money which, on his fictitious death, went—where it went. Of course Hubert is entitled by law and justice to claim this money, with all arrears ; but I can answer for his not doing so. You had better hear what he says before you go, that you may be able to say you have : but, in the meantime, I can tell you what he will do. He will make it over to him by a deed of gift. For every reason I wish it to be so, and I am sure Hubert will. That relieves him from refunding ; and his private acknowledgment of the fraud will save him from a public exposure. On the other hand, the fact of Hubert's newly discovered identity cannot be explained away, for it necessarily implies its own previous suppression ; but the scandal must and shall be prevented, as far as possible. I have every reason for that. And I will prevent it by laying the blame (before the world) on a volunteer agent who shall be called by courtesy unknown. This I am able to do, because Charlotte Wilcox told me she had good

reason for believing that his rascally servant invented the plot and carried it out. I have a right to make use of that belief, and I think the terms altogether may be called easy."

"They are indeed," said Dr. Ranston, beginning to seal a letter. "I don't think I could have brought myself to let him off so cheap."

CHAPTER XL.

IDYDY DYTCHLEY, having just read Elfrida's letter, was considering its contents, balancing the losses and gains of her diplomacy, and reviewing the whole question as it then stood. With regard to the first subject of meditation she had no doubt at all. Clearly it was better that Hubert should be Everard's heir than have gone back to Elfrida at Freville Chase without a name. The losses and gains were questionable, especially the gains. Ida had made a good marriage, but circumstances rendered it practically worse than a bad one. Hubert was indeed heir presumptive to all and more than all that he had lost: but suppose Everard were to marry after all! "Oh! if he had married Ida," she thought, "Hubert might have married Elfrida, whose fortune would have made it prudent, as well as unworldly, and so nice altogether." Colouring with vexation, wincing under a sudden twinge of remorse, akin to the sensation produced by the first plunge of a vessel into the trough of the sea, she passed on to the third subject, the whole question, but only to find there a larger and clearer view of the losses gained and the gains lost.

St. Paul's exhortation to bear one another's burdens, is oftener inculcated than obeyed, particularly where blame attaches; and so it was now.

Lady Dytchley did not feel at all inclined to be responsible in any degree for the Marquis Moncalvo, but considered that she was entitled by every law, divine and human, to make him responsible for herself. Of course he should. What had he done with the letters? and why did he follow them to Rome, and why did he keep back Sir Richard's telegram, that would have stopped all the mischief? And then to have passed his own nephew off as somebody else, and eighteen years afterwards let him seem to be nobody, and when he was trying to be somebody, try to entice him off nowhere!

While she was exciting herself with these reflections, the Marquis unexpectedly appeared. She refrained from all manifestations till the courier was on the further side of the door, which he had shut delicately, and then she looked at him. There was an angry smile on her lips and a light of evil omen in her eyes.

"To what new fatality," she said, "do I owe the surprise of this visit?"

"To none that I am aware of," answered the Marquis, feeling much interior discomfort, and concealing much of it by the force of a fine manner. "Your wishes are disappointed for the present, owing to a letter from Freville Chase—a servant was sent to Marseilles with it. But under existing circumstances the journey cannot be given up, nor even postponed more than a few days."

Lady Dytchley's eyes glowed and grew, seeming to approach nearer and nearer to him, like the lamps of an omnibus coming on slowly through a London fog.

"I ought *not* to be surprised at anything," said she, "after what I have known of you ; but I was hardly prepared for this. I was hardly prepared to see you come and apologise for not being able to deceive your own nephew any longer."

The Marquis, notwithstanding his known courage and varied powers, felt an almost uncontrollable desire to run away ; but feeling again, for the fourth time during the last four months, that he must *Awake, arise, or be for ever fall'n*, he said :

"If you will do me the favour of examining your memory, you will find that the idea of persuading Mr. Hubert Freville to be at a distance from Miss Dytchley, by lengthening the search for his parentage, originated in your own mind, and ended there. You proposed it to me, you suggested that I should entice him on board a ship bound for Australia, you became very angry when I refused to do so, you said that you would hear no more, and you shut the door in my face."

"I didn't shut the door in your face. I said I was tired and ill, and so I was—quite worn out, after sitting here for three-quarters of an hour listening to you, and seeing you try to make out that you had done nothing, after deceiving poor dear Ida, and killing Everard by it, and trying to kill Hubert—*your own nephew*, in a duel, and bring scandal and shame and disgrace and everything else on us all. And now you actually have

the face to pretend that you don't know who Hubert is, when it has all been confessed and proved, and the woman you employed to swear that he died has told the whole story, and the other woman too, and Charlotte Wilcox has recognised him, and shown a photograph that she had done of him in Paris, which is as like him now as it can stare, and the other woman says that the man who came in disguise to the White Hart at Lyneham and tried to carry off Charlotte Wilcox (who recognised him then as your servant) was the same that brought Hubert to her to be passed off as old Lord de Freville's nephew. And then, when it was found out, years after, you let him be taken for the son of nobody-knows-who, to screen yourself, though he was engaged to be married, and it was ruining his chances, and making everybody believe he was the nephew of the nursery-maid, and worrying Everard to death when he was getting better in spite of you, so that he has hardly a chance now. And because I was of course anxious that Hubert should be out of the worry and mortification of all this till he had made things right, according to the story that your accomplice, the nursery-maid, had told, you insinuate that I wanted you to entice him by false promises on board an Australian ship, to be wrecked, or burnt at sea, or murdered by bushrangers."

"I have never insinuated anything of the kind," said the Marquis: "but you certainly expressed a very strong desire that he should be led on by promises of evidence to Australia or South America. You forget that, and you forget what

your reason was. You told me that you wished him to be out of the way because you wished Miss Dytechley to marry Lord de Freville, instead of him."

"When the time was fixed for her wedding, and I was staying on in Paris, at great inconvenience, to get her trousseau!" said Lady Dytechley, in a sarcastic tone tempered by uneasiness. "Some people seem to think they can say anything of one, if there is no witness to contradict it."

"They do, indeed," said he with emphasis.

"Yes, they do. You had better not try to make out it was me. Your character is too well known for that, particularly now that people know how you got rid of him when he was three years old. They are talking about it in every direction, I can tell you; and the only thing you can do is to go and acknowledge it, and beg his pardon and Charlotte Wilcox's. If you don't you will be sent to the Isle of Portland, and have to work with a chain round your leg. You *may* get off, if you are very quick about it. I am sure I hope you will, and repent of your evil deeds. But if your priests are worth anything, they will make you stand in a white sheet and confess the whole thing before the whole family on all sides, and before Charlotte Wilcox, and before all the villagers at Chase End"——

"Where every one knows whose husband I am," added the Marquis, beginning to retreat. "In your hatred to me you forget that."

"What has that to do with it?" interrupted Lady Dytechley, rising in pursuit. "Isn't it

enough to have behaved to her as you have, and stolen letters and telegrams to do it, and made her miserable for life, and brought disgrace on her and all belonging to her, and killed behind his back the man she was engaged to and loved as much as she hates you. And Dr. Ranston has proved that the child whose death he certified was not like Hubert at all, but had flaxen hair and light blue eyes, and that you called on him, all the same, at Florence, to thank him for attending your nephew, and sent the certificate of his death, which you had bought from the nursery-maid, to Sir Richard (for there it is now at Freville Chase) when he was all the time alive and well, and packed him off to Beynham as the nephew that died. Don't talk to me."

But the Marquis had no intention of talking. Truth and its opposite had been so curiously blended, and the latter was so unimportant by comparison, that the contest was hopeless; and when she brought up Dr. Ranston's recollections against him, he disappeared without warning or farewell, but had not gone far down the stairs when Dr. Ranston himself began to ascend them. They met halfway. The doctor recognised him instantly, raised his hat, and said:

"I think I have the honour of addressing the Marquis Moncalvo. May I speak to you for a few minutes? I have something to communicate that will be for your advantage to hear. My rooms are close by, in this hotel."

The Marquis dimly recognised an old acquaintance, half remembered and quite inopportune.

"I really am so much engaged at this moment," he said, continuing to descend.

But the doctor descended too, and planting himself in the way, said in a voice that could be heard for some distance around: "I will not detain you long; but my business is of such importance that I must speak to you here, if you will not come to my room. I have travelled from England on purpose, and I shall not return till I have said what I came to say. If you have any regard for your own reputation, you will not hesitate."

As he said this purposely in French, and there were ears within earshot, the Marquis had no alternative. Dr. Ranston led the way into his own sitting-room, and shutting the door, stood with his back to it. At the same time the door of the next room was opened, and the lawyer who had come from London walked in.

"You asked me to come here, that no one should overhear us, I believe," said the Marquis haughtily. "What is the meaning of this? Do you suppose that I shall let you have a witness, when I have none? How do I know who you are, or what is your object?"

"You may have as many witnesses as you like," said Dr. Ranston; "but I think you will prefer not having them. I am acting for Lord de Freville, in reference to his brother, your nephew; and this is his lawyer. We have come to save your reputation, if you are willing. If not, the law will take its course, and I need hardly tell you what the result of that will be."

"What guarantee have I that this not a con-

spiracy?" said the Marquis. "I am not acquainted with either of you."

"My friend is a stranger to you, I know," answered the doctor; "but you are not unacquainted with me. Do you remember calling on me in Florence, eighteen years ago, to thank me for attending your nephew, Hubert Freville, at Alassio, and giving a certificate of his death?"

"Very likely I did. I really cannot undertake to remember the face of a man whom I saw once, for five minutes, eighteen years ago. You might have told me that on the staircase. Have the goodness to let me pass."

"With your good permission, not yet. The child I attended was the nephew and heir of the late Lord de Freville. The certificate was bought for you from the nurserymaid—you best know by whom, and you sent it to Sir Richard Dytchley as certifying the death of your nephew, who was then passed off as the other child whom I saw dead. A short time ago, as you must be aware, the woman who sold the certificate confessed the fraud, and her evidence, together with that of the head nurse, who now keeps the White Hart at Lyneham, was taken. This deprived your nephew not only of the position that he had always supposed to be his, but even of a name, and the family was therefore in imminent danger of extinction; but the present Lord de Freville is not a man to be baffled by anything that manhood can face or intellect penetrate. He has discovered and proved that the man who was thought to be the late Lord de Freville's nephew is his own brother, who was supposed to have died at

Alassio. He has discovered and proved what I am unwilling to characterise. Charlotte Wilcox, the other two women, my own journal, a photograph of his brother, and a miniature of the child who died, have placed the facts beyond question. It remains for you to say whether you will enable Lord de Freville to take the necessary steps quietly, or whether you will compel him to prosecute. But before you decide"——

"Do your worst," interrupted the Marquis. "Everyone will know why Lord de Freville has done this. Tell him that I fight with a gentleman's weapons, not with paid witnesses and pretended journals, and lawyers hidden behind folding-doors. Do what you like, all of you. I have listened long enough, and too long. If he wishes to attack me let him do it like a man. Let me pass, or I shall be obliged to make a way for myself."

"If you deliberately prefer to have your conduct exposed in an open court of law," said Dr. Ranston, "be it so. But before you take that irrevocable step, suppose you listen to what Lord de Freville in his extreme generosity proposes, with the full concurrence of his brother. He offers, not only to have it arranged quietly and give out that the fraud was perpetrated by some unauthorised agent, which he has reasons for believing to be the fact, but also to leave you in possession of the money you inherited on his brother's fictitious death. I need not remind you what the loss of so considerable a sum, with arrears and interest, would be. He and his brother will give up the whole to you by a deed

of gift, and save your character from utter ruin, if you will simply do an act of bare restitution to your own sister's son, which the law will do for you in a very different way, if you refuse. He gives you the opportunity of making the restitution your own act, without any loss of any kind, when he has the right, as well as the power, to crush you by enforcing it. The man who offers this is the man whom you have injured beyond all possible redress. You have destroyed his happiness and shortened his life by means that I need not remind you of. You know them, and I know them. Yet now, when you are in his power, and justice claims for him her bare rights against you, he asks as a favour that you will allow him to save you from yourself."


"May I speak to you for a moment alone?" said the Marquis, in a low voice, hoarse and scarcely articulate.

He followed Dr. Ranston into the next room, and held out his hand.

"Tell him," he said, "that I am at his disposal—that I will do everything he wishes because he wishes it. Tell him that I am the most miserable of men, that my life is a slow torture, so intolerable that, if there were not still in me some remains of the Faith I have been driven to neglect, I should have ended it with my own hands long ago. The injury he has received from me is one that only a saint could forgive. I deserve the bitterest hatred and contempt: he has shown the most sublime generosity. You have disarmed me. I was prepared to defy all the world. I am ready to humble myself for his sake before it.

For this I have to thank you. Tell him one thing more from me, if you please. Tell him that I was not always what I am now, and still less what I seem to be. Circumstances that I might have controlled, but did not make, have led me to be as I am, and seem as I seem, and bring sorrow or misfortunes, against my natural will, on all whose interest and happiness I naturally desired to promote. Tell him, too, that his charitable judgment is correct. I will not say who was the author of what was done at Alassio: but I was not. I can say no more, unless it were to him, and that may not be. I shall go to London immediately, and if you will tell me where to find the lawyer, I will call on him without delay, that he may be able to take the necessary steps as soon as possible."

Dr. Ranston wrote the name and address on a card, and the Marquis left the room by another door.



CHAPTER XLI.

THE Marquis Moncalvo went to London by the first available train, and a few hours after his arrival called on Everard's lawyer, who, with the least possible delay, proceeded to take all necessary measures for concluding as soon as possible the delicate business entrusted to his care.

Sir Richard and Elfrida remained at Freville Chase, by Everard's desire, until the time approached for the wedding.

Lady Dytechley, though satisfied with the remedial turn that events had taken, was of opinion that, viewing matters as they stood in reference to herself, it would still be advisable for her to stay in Paris till the end of May. When she set out, her object was to leave a very small interval between the return to Netherwood and the duty of dressing for the dinner-party at Bramscote. The train was equal to the occasion, and fitted in so well that it would just bring her home in time to dress with becoming care.

Between half-past two and a quarter to three on that afternoon, Sherborne, who had come to Lyneham for the purpose of administering justice on such evil-doers as might be brought before the bench of magistrates, walked into number one

sitting-room at the White Hart, with a view to regaling himself on bread-and-cheese before riding back to Hazeley by circuitous ways. It happened that Dr. Ranston walked into the same room at the same time, but not with the same view. He had come to meet an express train, and having missed it by mistaking the hour, strolled into the town. While looking at the prints in the bookseller's window, he fell in with Sherborne, and they went into the White Hart together.

"What brings you to Lyneham to-day?" said Sherborne.

"I came from Freville Chase to catch the express," answered Dr. Ranston, "and missed it by my own fault; so that I shall have the pleasure of waiting two hours, and losing about four, and dining at ten o'clock."

"How is Lord de Freville?" asked Sherborne.

"Wonderfully well, circumstances considered, and temperament, and all that makes him what he is. But I wish he were not going to dine at Bramscote to-day. I wanted to stay, and see how he got through it. I came to Freville Chase yesterday, to see how he was, and I should have remained over to-morrow, if he had not assured me that he had rather meet Lady Dytechley at a dinner party, than have her call at Freville Chase and begin a long story, that he could neither refuse to hear nor believe if he heard it. I suppose you will be there? Do keep an eye on her, and interrupt them, if you see conversation going on between them *a quattr'occhi*."

"You may rely upon it that I will. But tell me—Had he any infectious fever in Rome?"

"Certainly not."

"I thought not: but Lady Dytechley told my sister-in-law, the other day in Paris, that he was sent out of the hotel on that account, and became dangerously ill in consequence."

"Upon my word now! Did she say that? There is just this much truth in it, that he was sent out of the hotel through a mistake, and was of course in greater danger from not being attended to. But it made little or no difference in the long run. The mischief was done before—I have already told you how. Of course one can see why she set it about. She really is what I have heard ladies call a dreadful woman."

"Yes, I always thought so. She has perfected the act of making her opinions agree with her wishes. Miss Dytechley told me about your seeing the Marquis Moncalvo in Paris two months ago. What did you think of him?"

"That he was a man born for better things. What he has done admits of no excuse on any pretext whatever; but he showed feeling then, and I have no reason to suppose that it was put on."

"I am glad to hear it. He has had enough to sober him. I strongly suspect, from what my sister-in-law tells me, that his wife has scarcely spoken to him since the tragic scene in Rome. By the by, she is expected at Netherwood for the wedding, which is to take place next week."

"Is she? I hope there is no chance of her meeting Lord de Freville at Bramscote."

"No, indeed. She is not expected till tomorrow. But anyhow, Sir Roger is bothered enough at having been let in to ask Lady Dytechley."

"Are you quite sure that, if she were to come sooner, Lady Dytechley would not take her to dine there, instead of her sister, under the delusion of making out her own case by showing that they could meet as if nothing had happened?"

"I am sure she wouldn't. She is too sharp to run risks just now. She only wants to make it right for herself, by his being seen speaking to her in public. I can answer for it that she will take good care to do no more."

While they were speaking, a lady with two servants, a man and maid, drove up to the hotel from the station, ordered a pair-horse fly, and seeing the door of number one sitting-room ajar, walked in. She was closely veiled, and her face was turned away from them. They were not aware of her presence till the waiter came to say that her fly was at the door. Sherborne, who was standing close to the window, then looked around and saw her leave the room.

"If I am not mistaken," he said, "that was the very lady we were speaking of. She must have come sooner than was expected, and driven here to get a pair of horses to go on to Netherwood. Well! I can't help it."

"I am very glad she heard us, poor thing," said Dr. Ranston, "very glad indeed."

"I should be more glad," thought Sherborne, "if she hadn't heard quite all that I said."

The fly was now driving off. "I wonder who it is," remarked the waiter.

"Why, Miss Dytchley as was," answered the ostler.

"Well, to be sure!" said the boots.

At twenty minutes past five, by the stable clock, Lady Dytchley arrived at Netherwood, and as soon as the big wicker imperial could be carried upstairs, began to decorate herself for the dinner-party at Bramscote. The report of Ida's unexpected arrival reached her as she was mounting the stairs, but she kept her feelings in reserve and her thoughts on the symbolical toilet already composed for the occasion. The toilet was, as usual, well adapted for its purpose. The body and skirt, with the appendages thereunto belonging, were of a limper material than she was wont to wear, the lines were in gentle curves that pointed more or less downwards, and the train appeared to have no consciousness of its own dignity.

She had not yet seen Sir Richard. That unfortunate martyr to his own shortcomings knew that she was at home again, but he was very much engaged at the time, in making feeble protests against a certain project that Ida had conceived in the Lyneham fly and now insisted on carrying into effect.

The first symptom of a disturbing nature was her prolonged retirement with her maid. Sir Richard marvelled after a while, remarking to himself that he had hardly seen her, and that she never used to be all that time fiddling about with silks and furbelows. He went to her door, and

continuously proclaimed his disappointment in a reproachful voice till Ida appeared, wearing a blue and white dressing-gown, over which a yard of golden hair hung down in loose waves.

"I shall be ready soon," she said; "but the things had to be unpacked, you know, and one's hair, after travelling"——

"Yes, but wait a moment," said he. "What are you dressing up like this for?"

"To dine at Bramscote. I shall be ready very soon."

She shut the door, and Sir Richard, not liking to remonstrate aloud from the other side, retreated to the nearest untenanted room, where he waited more than half-an-hour, listening for her footsteps. At last she came, and then he executed a skilful manœuvre. He suddenly rushed out of his hiding-place, and closing in from behind, caused her to step backwards into the room.

"My dear Ida," he said. "You know, you understand, you *must* see. It wouldn't do. It would look so—I should never hear the last of it."

"It can't be helped," said Ida, looking down at her fan without seeing it.

"God bless us all!" said he. "That isn't like you; and the voice is somebody else's—I don't know whose, for I don't know it. Don't you see, it wouldn't be right, and we should all look so rotten. It isn't a pretty word, but what can one say when one is driven into a corner? You see, you don't know exactly why your mother is going there. In fact, between you and I, she made Sir Roger do it to get the meeting over. I wouldn't

have mentioned the subject before you; only I *must* show you how it is. You didn't know that *he* is to be there, and I didn't want to tell you right out, of course—you understand me—but "——

"It can't be helped," repeated Ida, "and my mother has come. They were carrying the boxes upstairs ever so long ago."

"Well, but do listen to reason before we see her, or there will be such a row as never was."

He continued to remonstrate, looking from time to time at his watch, till Ida began to move, and then he followed her downstairs, muttering as he went :

"What's to be done? I won't go. I couldn't, I really couldn't be seen. Why, it's awkward enough as it is, very awkward for your mother (only she *would* have it) and worse for me, who had nothing to do with anything. Elfrida felt it so that she went right off to Hazeley with a headache or something, and won't go, though they are all going. It would look like a got-up thing, and people would misunderstand—you know; they would indeed."

Whilst he was making this last appeal Lady Dytechley came on the scene. She was startled for a moment, and unpleasantly reminded, by resemblance and by contrast, of that other dinner-party at Bramscote, with all its consequences; but the carriage had been waiting ten minutes at the door, and Ida meant to go.

"You see, Elfrida refused," said Lady Dytechley, "and they only expected two, and it would put everything out to take you instead of your father. If I had only known before "——

Ida looked unintelligently across the hall, and moved onwards towards the carriage.

"Stop a moment," said Sir Richard. "You see—what am I to do?"

"I can't help it," answered Ida in a pettish tone.

"This is what you have done with her," remarked Sir Richard. "She never used to go on like that. She was as good as gold. There it is. That's what you have done, with all your smelling-bottles, and your doctors that nobody ever heard say all the things, and your notes to Lady Oxborough, and the sparks flying upwards. You must get out of it as you can. *I* can do nothing with her."

Lady Dytechley crossed the hall in undignified haste.

"My dear Ida," she said, clutching at the nearest bit of drapery, "do wait an instant. I really don't see how"——

"I can't help it," repeated Ida. "They won't mind three."

"They won't have three," said Sir Richard, standing square in the middle of the hall. "I declare I won't go, if you do."

"Well, considering that Elfrida was to have gone," suggested Lady Dytechley.

"No, she wasn't," said he. "She wouldn't go at any price, just because the whole thing is so uncommonly awkward."

"Yes, but still, under the circumstances, as Ida is dressed, and Sir Roger is such an old friend of yours. Two ladies would never do, but one extra"——

"The one extra won't be me. I'll be"—

And these were again his two last words. Lady Dytechley objected to the resolution, but had no means of expressing her thoughts, for Sir Richard, being the more active of the two, made use of his legs to symbolise his intention, and was out of sight before she could take any steps to restrain his flight. Ida had by this time taken her place in the carriage, and Lady Dytechley followed, seeing no alternative within her reach, but feeling a great heat in the roots of her hair.

The family coach moved off, and Sir Richard moved on, wondering whether there would be any dinner for him. As soon as the coast was clear he came forth, rang several bells and expressed himself thus:

"Look here! I couldn't go—I don't know what's the matter with me, I am sure"—

The butler, understanding the case and comparing it with a certain conspicuous absence at luncheon nine months before, asked whether the dinner should be at the usual time. Sir Richard paused and reflected.

"I have got to wait," he thought, "anyhow, with nobody to speak to and nothing to do. I had better have something inside me first. But what am I to do all the evening? Upon my word, I could even stand that red-whiskered fellow."

There was very little talking in the family coach; but Lady Dytechley gave full occupation to her inventive powers by imagining, rejecting and rehabilitating plausible excuses for her disarrangement of Sir Roger's dinner table—that

being her euphemistic manner of expressing the difficulty. The substitution of a lady for Sir Richard, though rather embarrassing when viewed in connection with the final cause of the dinner-party, would not have deranged her dignity if the substitute had been any one except Ida : but as it was—oh !

“To have to walk into the room with *her*,” she thought, “and *he* there, and Lady Oxborough seeing it all, and one’s being left without one’s husband, as if one had done something one was ashamed of ! If it had been any one else—even that man with red whiskers, who always says something dreadful, or even Lady Fyfield, or that horrid old woman Mrs. Atherstone. But to go in with Ida, so soon—the very first time after it all—and just when everything was to be made right, and to have it all set to wrongs, and make her and me to be misunderstood and talked about, and all because she *would*—Oh ! oh ! oh ! oh !”

These interjections were uttered audibly in a corner of the family coach. Ida heard them, had a dim impression of their meaning, and muttered :

“It can’t be helped.”

This remark brought the interjections to a sudden end, and produced a series of irrelevant statements, to which Ida replied in monosyllables. Before they had passed the lodge Lady Dytechley longed for the mild interruption of Sir Richard’s little songs, and registered a vow that she would never more explode at the sound of them.

“We shall be late,” she thought, as the carriage drove up to the door, “and I shall have to explain

before them all, with those two old maids from the Dower House listening and staring, and Mr. de Beaufoy looking at me—he is sure to be staying at Hazeley just now, when I particularly don't want to see him."

She approached in a deprecatory spirit, feeling herself to be—

"The observed of all observers, quite, quite down!"

Yet in fact she never was less observed, all observation being centred on Ida and Everard. Sir Roger Arden was exceedingly troubled at seeing Ida, and told himself in confidence that he had been played the fool with; but he was too well bred to show any sign of surprise. Lady Dytchley, feeling that she must be herself now, or something less ever after, said that Sir Richard had felt unwell (which was quite true when he contemplated the idea of coming there with them) and that he had insisted on sending Ida instead, which was no less true when considered as a question of alternatives. She then said a few words to Everard and passed on.

"The impudence of that woman exceeds all calculation," remarked Lady Oxborough, in a low but penetrating tone to Sir Roger, who protested and muttered, and said all sorts of irrelevant things to drown the clear vibrations of her voice. "She *is* so vulgar when she wants to show off. Who was she? I heard once, and I was just as wise as before."

But Sir Roger's hearing had become obtuse for the moment, and he slipped away, leaving the question to take care of itself, which it did by reaching the ears of Lady Dytchley, reminding

her of Sir Richard's too candid expression of opinion in the Rue de Rivoli. It would be hard to say whether annoyance, irritation, or sense of failure predominated within; but necessity, though it knows no law, is often a law in itself. She was presently seen talking to Lady Oxborough, and Lady Oxborough, having paid her off for the unsuccessful proposal at Baveno, was moderately civil. All this happened in about three minutes, and in less than five, dinner was announced. Everard now came forward to meet Ida, who was moving on by slow degrees, talking to one person or another as she went. When Sir Roger was about to take her arm, she put her hand into Everard's, let it linger there for an instant, and drawing it back haughtily, turned away. Everard appeared to be quite calm and almost impassive, as a mass of falling water looks motionless at a distance. He quietly mingled with the small group around, asked Miss Exmore how her new horse had turned out, and seeming to feel an interest in the answer, made his way onwards. Mrs. Sherborne said to herself, as he took her in to dinner, "Either the spell is broken, or this will kill him."

She had arranged the party for her father, and restricted it not only in number, but, as far as she could, in quality. Besides Lady Oxborough, for whose instruction it had been proposed, her husband and daughter, who were a necessary consequence, and the priest, who was always invited, no one came except from Hazeley; so that there were no reporters. This was not what Lady Dytechley had wanted; but, after over-

hearing Lady Oxborough's comments, she was of opinion that the party was quite large enough and, on the whole, well arranged. The table-talk was dull, constrained and broken. Everard, indeed, threw some life into the conversation near him, but only made the flatness more apparent by contrast. Mrs. Sherborne tried to second his efforts, and failed at the outset. "This wicked waste," she thought, "this trampling under foot a priceless treasure that was her own! What I see to-night stupefies me. I feel as if I were in a bad dream."

The number fourteen, though even and therefore reducible to seven pairs, has the awkward peculiarity of separating one pair and putting two ladies together. De Beaufoy was thus placed opposite Miss Exmore, whom he had taken in to dinner, but was not dissatisfied with that, having Mrs. Sherborne on his right; and Miss Exmore, being near Everard, whose adventures had aroused in her a large amount of curiosity, not devoid of hero-worship, had no objection to her position. She had Lady Fyfield on her right, but talked exclusively to him, and it was remarked that she had never appeared to such advantage. The follies of the period were put off, and left no trace. Her higher instincts were awakened. Hero-worship was doing a good work, at least as long as the occasion lasted. Everard could only talk to one at a time, and as Miss Exmore monopolised him, Mrs. Sherborne would have been left silent, had not De Beaufoy been on the other side. Lady Dytchley, being on De Beaufoy's left, with Lord Oxborough on hers, wished

herself at Netherwood, while Lord Oxborough, thinking his position inopportune, preferred to puzzle himself with Mrs. Atherstone, which enabled Sir Roger to converse with the priest instead of with Ida, whom he wished anywhere but next himself, and made Hubert talk to her against his will, which made Sherborne talk to Lady Oxborough against his, and left Lady Fyfield sitting silent, for Lady Dytchley, who was doing likewise, to contemplate at her leisure, but not at her ease. They were placed thus:—

Sir Roger Arden—Ida.

The Priest	}	{	Hubert Freville.
Mrs. Atherstone	}	{	Lady Oxborough.
Lord Oxborough	}	{	Sherborne.
Lady Dytchley	}	{	Lady Fyfield.
De Beaufoy	.	.	Miss Exmore.

Mrs. Sherborne—Lord de Freville.

The position of Lady Dytchley, between De Beaufoy, who had known her too long to be a pleasant neighbour just then, and Lord Oxborough, whose presence troubled her mind, whether he was talking to her or not, became at length so intolerable that she determined at all hazards to change it, and began to cast about in her mind for a plausible excuse. None presented itself, though she had never, perhaps, thought so vigorously before; but it happened that Ida, in her wayward mood, had conceived the idea of taking her mother's place, and intended to do it, whatever might be said of her by any one there or elsewhere.

Dr. Ranston would not have been glad that

she had overheard what he said at the White Hart, could he have foreseen the effect of his words. Had she not heard them, she would not have come to meet Everard, for no one would have told her that he would be there: but they had been heard, and she had come, impelled by an impulse that she could neither understand nor resist. She had seen him, and the sight was so conclusive to her heart that resentment was her only refuge from despair too overpowering to be concealed. She hated herself, but he had been the objective part of herself, and the loss of him was the loss of all; and if he had not written those few dreadful words that she had seen—not thought them, not been capable of thinking them, she would have been the happiest woman in the world.

Poor child! Her anger turned itself insensibly from the subjective part of her, that was nothing now because it was not his, to the objective that was all. She was angry with him because she was angry with herself.

Lady Dytechley felt her eyes without seeing them, and looking up, saw her lean forward, shivering impatiently, as if suffering from cold, either in fact or in idea. She at once improved the occasion with all her might.

"I am afraid you are feeling the draught," she said, "coming from Italy" (she meant Ida not the draught), "and I should like the air so much after being stuffed up in a railway carriage with an old lady who had bronchitis and wouldn't let in a breath of air."

"I am so sorry I had that window put open,"

said Sir Roger : "but the weather changed so suddenly, It shall be shut at once."

"I assure you that it will be the greatest comfort to me," said she, "and just what I have been wanting all day—if you will allow me to change places with her. It really will."

Sir Roger, who had been secretly wishing that Ida, or himself, but not both together, were happening to sit somewhere else, replied with moderated alacrity :

"By all means ! I only hope it hasn't done any mischief."

Lady Dytchley edged herself and her chair out of the space they had filled, walked as unobtrusively as she could up to the top of the table, and, sitting down within the smallest possible compass, tried to seem as if she had not moved.

Ida was already in her place, causing Lord Oxborough to wish himself away even more anxiously than before.

De Beaufoy wished that both she and himself were at some part of the table further from Everard ; for her state of mind could be read in the chilled light of her eyes and in the volcanic stillness of her face, from which every trace of colour had gone.

She turned her head towards him for an instant, without looking at him, and said :

"Have you forgotten me ? I hardly know how long it is since I saw you last, for I don't remember much about what I was, and care still less ; but it seems to me that the time is not very long according to the almanac."

"Time is more likely to show its marks in me than in you," answered De Beaufoy, "seeing that I am three and twenty years older. I certainly had not forgotten you, and could not, unless I had lost sight and memory."

"Sight and memory?—I used once to think they were realities—and feeling, too, and the sound of spoken words, and the meaning of their tones; but they are all fancy, and the thing that fancies them, which one calls 'I,' has no separate existence, as soon as one ceases to dream. The object one believes in melts away or turns out to be somebody else when one approaches it."

The words, though spoken to De Beaufoy, were directed to Everard, especially the last. Yet no sooner were they uttered than a softer expression came into her eyes, momentary repentance into her heart.

De Beaufoy remained silent long enough to show that he was waiting till she had quite finished, and then said in a very deferential voice :

"Forgive me for saying so—but one must be open when it comes to principles—those ideas are not yours, and they sit uneasily upon you. I am not at all up in the sort of thing; but Kant, if I am not mistaken, reduced everything that we perceive in ourselves and out of ourselves to mere phenomena; and Fichte improved on him till he made life a dream; and Hegel went further still, for, as somebody said of him, he omitted the dreamer. Did you ever see those lines in Hans Breitmann's ballads :

*'As der Hegel say of his system, dat only one mǎns knew
 What der Teufel it meant, und he couldn't tell, und der
 Jean Richter too,
 Who say of his Buch, God knows I meant somedings
 When dis Buch I writ,
 But God only weiss what dass Buch means now, for
 I have forgotten it.'*

"I don't care where it came from," said Ida;
 "I never said it was my own. I daresay it is
 Hegel's, and I don't care if it is."

"And I didn't say that it was. How could I,
 without the man who knew what der Teufel it
 meant? I am not pretending to say or guess
 where it came from; but the outcome of it is
 more startling than you are aware of perhaps.
 You allow, I suppose, that there is such a thing
 as a soul."

"Yes, of course. One knows there is some-
 thing, whatever it may be, besides one's body."

"And you allow that its existence is part of
 yours—that you wouldn't be alive without it?"

"Yes, yes. I said so."

"Well, then, if you have no separate existence,
 and your soul is part of you, your soul is a joint-
 stock property that you possess in common with
 the rest of the world."

"Yes, that is the kind of thing I mean."

"Are you prepared to say that you and Exmore
 have one soul?"

The sound of that name, indissolubly bound up
 with the last hours of her once perfect confidence
 in Everard, brought colour into her pale cheeks,
 light into the depths of her eyes. Everard looked,
 and tried to wish that he had not seen her. He
 looked again, and every nerve shivered like poplar

leaves on a hillside. The colour left her cheeks, the light in her eyes lost its warmth.

"I think you might have avoided mentioning that contemptible puppet, at least," she said; and the tone of her voice would have much diminished the said Mr. Exmore interiorly, though her contempt was thoroughly undeserved, except from her own very natural point of view.

"I mentioned him simply as the extremest case I could think of," said De Beaufoy. "If we have no separate existence, we must all have one soul, and Exmore's cannot be separated from yours. The conclusion is inevitable; I don't wonder at your not liking the idea. I shouldn't like to find that my own soul was inseparable from Garibaldi's; but, if your principle is to be admitted, we must both of us submit to that sort of communism. In both cases the idea seems to me one of the most unpleasant that could be evolved out of anybody's inner consciousness: but then I don't believe in a universal soul. You tell me implicitly that you do, and, if it really is as you say, you cannot get rid of Exmore."

"You must know very well," said Ida pettishly, "that I couldn't have meant to talk such nonsense as that. But I am not able to argue with you, and so you could twist my words as you liked."

"On the contrary, I untwisted them. You will see on reflection that what I have said is as plain as a Methodist chapel newly whitewashed."

"Yes, if I had meant all you supposed: but you *must* have known that I didn't."

"I did; but other people would have misunderstood you, and I took the liberty of showing how."

"But you are running away with the idea that I meant nothing in what I said. I *do* believe that we are all a part of something else—I don't know what—and are changed, I don't know how, quite changed, so that there is nothing left of our former self. You may tell me for ever that it isn't so, and give reasons that I can't answer; but you won't convince me against the evidence of open facts, and the testimony of my own eyes, and of my own consciousness with regard to myself."

"How can you be conscious of being somebody that you are not?"

"I don't mean that one becomes another person, as if you were changed into me. I mean that one's character, disposition, temper, likes and dislikes, and all that makes one what one is, and what one has been known by and liked for, changes so that one can only remember in a confused sort of way what one was, and, if one ever tries to think how one could be the same again, one finds that it can't be, because all that made one so has changed, and one's nature has changed with it."

"Poor, dear child!" thought De Beaufoy, "she has been talking at him, not to me. They were meant to be one, and she is angry with him because she is angry with herself. What can I do to turn the conversation?"

"We are all more or less affected by circumstances," he said; "but unhappily we are inclined to forget, when we have the greatest need of remembering it, how much they are in our own power. Mrs. Atherstone, who is the most interesting old lady I ever knew, with great originality and a strong touch of genius, could tell you that,

and illustrate it from the history of her own remarkable life, which has been at different times a tragedy, a novel, and a drama. Did you ever talk to her?"

"No," said Ida in a softer voice. "I ought to have known her well, but I don't. I have often wished that I did."

"You really ought. She is worth knowing, I can assure you. If you like, I can give you a little epitome of her life and character in a few words, for I know both very well."

He did so, but not in a few words, and then he passed on to other subjects without pause, hoping to keep her attention till the ladies left the room; but by degrees her mind wandered from his words, and her eyes towards Everard.

"Could you or anyone have imagined," said Lady Oxborough to Sherborne, "that any mother would be so devoid of delicacy as to make such an exhibition, and not only bring her here, but actually change places, to put her as near him as possible?"

"I think she has simply lost her head over it," answered Sherborne. "When people believe in themselves too much, and happen to lose their self-confidence, they are liable to collapse like an Indiarubber ball with a hole in it."

"Yes, but to put her there, and make such a scene! If I had had the least idea of this, nothing should have made me come. I came here out of kindness to that horrid woman, when I ought to have been in town four days ago; and this is what I am let in for. But I never will meet her again anywhere."

"She will hear what you say," whispered Sherborne.

"I hope she does," answered Lady Oxborough. "The thing is disgraceful, and it would serve her right if Lord de Freville never spoke to her again. And so very, very wrong, too, towards her own daughter. I pity *her*, poor thing, making herself so dreadfully conspicuous, and looking at him (as if it were *his* fault!) like Norma when she denounces Pollione and is sorry for it."

If Lady Oxborough had remembered the twentieth canto of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, she could have found an apter comparison in Armida shooting at Rinaldo, and wishing that her arrows should miss their mark or turn against herself.

*"Vorrìa ben ella ch'è quadrel pungente
Tornasse indietro, e le tornasse al core;
Tanto poteva in lei, benche perdente,
(Or che poteva vittorioso?) amore.
Ma di tal suo pensier poi si ripente,
E nel discorde sen cresce il furore.
Così or paventa, ed or desia che tocchi
Appieno il colpo, e'l segue pur con gli occhi."*

De Beaufoy, failing this time to change the character of the conversation, adroitly introduced one topic after another, so that at length, but not till the ice was on its way, he almost monopolised the talking. He lost his advantage once, and she was having her own way again more decisively than before, when Mrs. Sherborne ended the struggle by rising to leave the room.

When the ladies had gone, Sir Roger walked slowly to the bottom of the table, saying to himself, "If ever I let anybody catch me again in this

way ! No wonder Dythchley had a stomach-ache ready." Then he sat down by Everard, casting a rueful glance at De Beaufoy, that said as plainly as a face could speak, "Do help me, like a good fellow, to start something pleasant."

"So you have got some archæologists coming here to-morrow," said De Beaufoy.

"Yes, by the by. I am glad you have reminded me," answered Sir Roger, trying to look amused. "You really must come and help me. There will be about half-a-dozen of them."

"What are they going to look at, besides the Roman encampment where there is nothing to see but grass mounds?"

"They don't care to see that. They want to see what remains here of the old house, that my great-grandfather sold some of the best land to pull down. They say there is something wonderful in the kitchen, and in the cellars, I believe. One of them is a Ledchester man. I have asked them to luncheon. I hope you will all come. Upon my word it will be a charity, for I don't know how to talk about these things."

The invitation was addressed audibly to all present. De Beaufoy and Sherborne promised to come. The priest had done so already. Lord Oxborough was very sorry, but would be half-way to London at that time. Everard said nothing about himself, but answered for Hubert, who was on the point of making an excuse. Hubert returned the compliment by ordering the carriage a few minutes afterwards. Everard having done what he came to do, and ventured more than he felt at all justified in venturing

again, had already registered a resolution that he would not enter the drawing-room. He said to Sir Roger, "Please, make my excuses to Mrs. Sherborne," and talked about the remains of the old house till the carriage was announced. When he had gone there was a dead silence, and then a murmuring sound of voices repressed.

In the drawing-room Mrs. Atherstone had been talking exclusively to Ida, and, about this time, having won as much of her confidence as there was to give, looked steadily into her eyes, saying :

"You must pardon what I am going to say—I am so very old, and have seen and suffered so very much—but you are not yourself. You are in an unnatural state. I have been so myself, long long ago, and I know how dreadful it is to bear, and how mad one feels, and how one longs for appreciative sympathy, even when one is most disposed to reject it. Won't you open your heart to an old woman who in her time has felt and suffered, perhaps, as much as human nature can bear? I can sympathise with you, understand you more fully and more intelligently than anyone who has not suffered as much as I have, and in the same way, can possibly do. Won't you open your heart to me?"

"I would," said Ida, after a short struggle with the pride of misery. "You are the only person that I could bear to hear speak on the subject. But you know it all: you *must* know it. Every one here knows it. No! they don't, they only know the outside. They don't know what I went *through* before I became what I am now. They

don't know how I was kept in maddening suspense, incessantly hearing dark hints that grew darker as time went on, clinging to my faith in that beautiful dream, hoping because I hoped in him, loving because I loved him, believing because I believed that all he said was true. I had no other foundation of belief, for I had been taught nothing that was intelligible of religion, except that the Catholic Church was out of the question. I had found it in him, as he was or seemed. When I saw in his own handwriting that he was false to me"——

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," said Mrs. Atherstone, "but have you the letter? I have a reason for asking the question."

"Yes, I have it at Netherwood in my writing-case."

"Then, will you allow me to see it? Life is uncertain, and his particularly so, if I am not mistaken. The past cannot be recalled, nor the consequences undone; but you would regret to have misjudged him, and regret, in such a case, means remorse. Don't bring that upon yourself. I have experienced it, and know too well what it is."

"You shall see the letter to-morrow, if you will come to Netherwood. I wouldn't show it to anyone else in the world. But you tell me that you have felt as I feel, and suffered as I suffer; and you have shown kindness to me, which no one else has done, not even my own sister. She went away when I came."

"Only to avoid dining here. Her motive was good, and I think she acted wisely. She is going

home to-morrow, and early, on purpose to see you as soon as possible. When shall I call?"

"Before luncheon, if it will not be inconvenient to you, for there will be nobody at home then. I hope you will come. It was very kind of you to propose it. But the letter is—what it is. When you have seen that letter, you will be and remain the only person in the world who knows what I endured before I became what I am. My mother has read it, for she told me of it and showed it to me; but she never understood me, and nobody does except you."

"Then," said Mrs. Atherstone, "I will call as soon after eleven as I can. But they are coming in from the dining-room, and we might be overheard. Well then, if I am alive and movable, I shall be at Netherwood by half-past eleven to-morrow morning."

Sherborne came up to Ida and talked for some time. She listened with her ears, and answered as if attending, but her eyes were fixed on the door through which Everard did not come, till at last she rose from her chair, saying:

"I am very sorry to go away so soon; but I crossed from Boulogne late last night, and had no sleep at all. I must ask my mother to order the carriage, for I can hardly sit up."

In moving on towards Lady Dytchley she passed Sir Roger, who was talking to Mrs. Sherborne, and heard him say:

"He told me to make his excuses to you. He went away with Hubert Freville before we left the dining-room. I wish he hadn't come. The doctor (so his brother told me) says that anything

of this kind might kill him. He said that, if he had known who they were to meet, he would have sent out every horse in the stables to prevent it."

Lady Dytchley, whose inner self was in a state of excessive disquietude, met Ida's intention half-way, and came towards her in undignified haste, saying :

"I really must go : I am tired to death."

Ida said, "Very well !" and asked Sherborne to order the carriage. Soon afterwards he and Sir Roger handed them into it. There had been very little conversation inside the family coach during the drive to Bramscote, and there was less when they drove home.

CHAPTER XLII.

IT was all my fault, fool that I was!" muttered Hubert, for his own private information, when he rose in the morning. "I ought to have prevented it at any cost. He was not the worse for it then, thank God! But the worst consequences are sometimes the slowest."

He dressed in hot haste, and hurried out of his room to see how Everard was. Anne the housemaid came by, and turning as she passed him, stood in the way.

"Oh, sir!" she said. "That dreadful bell! Did you hear it?"

"No. What bell? What is the matter?"

"The Freville bell, sir, that rings before—I heard it myself the night before my lord's father died, and I heard it soon after daybreak this morning—indeed I did—at first far away over the Chase, and then coming nearer and nearer, till it sounded right over the tower. Whatever shall we all do?"

Hubert hurried on, and opening the door of the king's room, went in. Everard, who was dressed, but lying on the bed more than half asleep, woke at the sudden sound and vibration of footsteps.

"Am I late?" he said, jumping up. "I dressed

long ago, but when I looked at my watch I found it was only five o'clock. Is it late?"

"No, not at all. I only came to see that you were all right after . . . the long drive. But what made you mistake the time?"

"I thought I heard the bell ringing for Mass, and got up in a hurry."

"But how are you?"

"Thank you," said Everard, smiling wearily, "I am just as well as I was before. There is safety sometimes in having to struggle with oneself. It must have happened soon. But what is the matter with you? They must have been telling you something. Has the Freville bell been ringing in somebody's imagination? I see by your face that it has. A bell rang early this morning, I know—I heard it myself—but it was the church bell tolling at Exbourne. The wind sets right for it, and the distance is not more than a mile and a half in a straight line, for the road is very roundabout from here. I know the sound, and I could hear where it came from. Besides, he added, smiling as of yore, "you mustn't go in for omens, dreams, and such like fooleries, as the catechism says."

Hubert went away, convinced but not satisfied, repeating to himself Dr. Ranston's caution, spoken the day before on leaving Freville Chase: "Wonderfully better—but there must be no relaxation of care."

Four hours afterwards, that is to say, at or about half-past eleven, Mrs. Atherstone appeared at Netherwood, and asking for Ida, was taken upstairs to her bedroom.

"I must apologise for bringing you here," said Ida: "but I was afraid of being interrupted."

"You have treated me as a friend," answered Mrs. Atherstone, "and I hope to show that I am."

"I have no doubt of that," said Ida; "but not in the way you suppose. When you have heard all, you will see that it cannot be. You will see that I have not deceived myself. Deceived myself? I only wish that it were so, that it were possible to think so, that it were possible to deceive myself into thinking I had deceived myself! It could alleviate nothing, and would add remorse to misery; yet I had rather believe it, though untrue, than be as I am. I would believe in him, if it were possible. I could cling without hope to that belief. But it cannot be."

She opened her writing-desk, and took out the two half-sheets of Everard's letter to the Marquis Moncalvo.

"This is it," she said. "But you must hear me first. I am not going to repeat what I said yesterday evening about myself and all I endured, and all I struggled against, from the day I left England to the day when life became existence. I am only going to tell you what will prepare you for the letter. When my mother insisted on leaving home a day sooner than was expected, I sent a note to him to come and see me that evening, and I know that the note was given to him, for Elfrida gave it to a man in the village and saw it go. He never came. I know why. My mother told him (though I never knew it till long afterwards) that she should consider us disengaged while she and I remained abroad. He said nothing

to that. She accidentally picked up this letter in the sitting-room of the hotel at Florence, and gave me an outline of its contents. I wrote imploring him to come and refute what I firmly believed to be an abominable calumny—you will see what it was. I had no answer. I waited three weeks, expecting him daily to arrive. Then my mother gave it into my own hands—this letter that I am going to show you—and I wrote again, in a state of mind that I think you can imagine. Again he neither came nor wrote.”

“Are you sure that he got all the letters you wrote to him?” said Mrs. Atherstone.

“I know he got the first I wrote from Florence. I gave the letter myself to the courier, who is a careful and trustworthy person, and told him to post it directly, which he did. It was the 12th of October. Besides, Elfrida told me that he *had* received it—she told me so in one she wrote to me the very day he got it. In mine, as I said, I had begged and implored him to come, and told him that my mother wished him to come. His not doing so explains why he said nothing when my mother told him that she should consider us disengaged while I was abroad—a thing that I neither would nor could have believed at the time, if all the world had sworn to it. Elfrida said that he was out of spirits, and I know why; but I cannot trust myself to speak of it. The letter I have in my hand will show sufficient cause for that, and explains why he did not care to come or write. Here it is.”

Mrs. Atherstone took it, and this was what she read :

First Half-sheet.

Page 1.

"My dear Marquis,

"I have been with Sir Richard all the morning, and shall be out all the afternoon; so that I should have put off answering your letter till to-morrow, had it been a less important one.

"The serio-comic affair in the lane was really nothing, as far as I am concerned. The two roughs never hit me at all, and the leader began to squeak as soon as he was touched. The poor thing was frightened, of course, but is not the worse for it.

Page 2.

"I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy, nor can I send her away. Looking at her past history, I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it. That protection she shall have.

"You are correct about the light you saw one evening in the tower. She was concealed there then, but now lives openly in my house with the servants, and cannot possibly be a cause of suspicion (as you suggest she might) to Miss Dytchley. But I really do not care,

Second Half-sheet.

and cannot see the beauty you speak of, but as she seems likely to be a good wife, and her fortune will help to keep up the old place, one must say according to the adage, 'Handsome is as handsome does.'

"In great haste.—Believe me, yours very sincerely,

"Everard Freville."

Mrs. Atherstone read it through slowly, and then

turned the two half-sheets over, as if reading it again.

"It can't be so," she said to herself. "I am as certain of that as of my own existence. But what can be the meaning of it? Stop! how stupid I am! There is something very suspicious in these half-sheets. There must be something left out."

She went to the window, examined both carefully, and compared them, not cursorily, but by accurate measurement.

"Just look here," she said, holding them up to the light. "These are not halves of one sheet, but of two. You can see it by the watermark, which is the same in each, proving that they both are the left-hand leaves of two separate sheets. I say 'left,' because one begins on the left leaf; but anyhow they are two lefts or two rights, by the watermark, and he wouldn't have written on half-sheets of paper without making some excuse, or saying something about it. And look at the edges where it was divided. If you examine the little jagged edges closely while I place them together, you will see that they don't agree. The inequalities are very slight, but there they are; and (see now) they won't fit in."

Ida took the two half-sheets and examined them attentively. "You are right," she said. "They don't fit. The right half of the first sheet must have been torn off."

"And the other half of the second as well," added Mrs. Atherstone.

"Or a half-sheet came to hand in the blotting-book, and was used as being lighter for the foreign post."

"I don't think so," answered Mrs. Atherstone, "for though the edges of the two don't fit, one hand, it seems to me, must have divided both. There is the same amount of force and the same sharpness in the jags. I should say that both sheets were torn in two by the same person at the same moment. However, I don't care whether it was so or not. The important point is that the first and second pages have no connection with each other, which you have seen to be the case. But why and by whom was the first sheet torn in two, or, if you will, cut? Well, it doesn't signify who did it, nor why it was done. Clearly it was done with an object which the writer could not have had. I need hardly insist upon that. Then somebody else did it, and in doing it, must have intended to put the writer in the worst light, and would not have suppressed the other page unless it would have put the writer in a more favourable light. You *must* see that."

"There is only one person who could have done it," said Ida passionately. "It could only be he who had an object in doing it, and the means of doing it—he who let it fall on the floor for my mother to pick up and make the most of."

"I must beg you most earnestly," said Mrs. Atherstone, "not to let that influence you against him. There are duties that nothing can exempt us from."

Ida crushed the two half-sheets between her fingers, and smoothed them again with repressed violence, but said nothing.

"And there are temptations," added Mrs. Atherstone, "that we don't understand, because

we don't know how they come, and how unprepared for them the tempted person was. *You* are open to be misjudged in that way, and you *are* misjudged, and you know that you are misjudged, and therefore you must think of others by the light of that knowledge."

"There certainly is a half-sheet wanting," said Ida, "and I don't know what was written on it: but whatever it was, it cannot undo what *is* written, cannot make him not to have written what he wrote."

"Certainly not; and if it means what the words, as they stand, appear to mean, I have nothing more to say. But I have read the letter very carefully and critically, and I am convinced that they don't. In the last sentence, as it stands, the style, which is slovenly, and the punctuation too in that part, is not his, is not in accordance with the rest of the letter. I could show that easily, but I want to ask you a question that may or may not be worth asking. When you wrote the first of your two letters, summoning him to Italy, did you happen to have sent an unimportant one, in the ordinary course of things, the same day, or just before?"

"I did write on the day before, and put it as usual on the table, for the courier to post. He used to come and look there for letters every day."

"And so did somebody else, I suspect," thought Mrs. Atherstone. "Confiscating a letter would be no worse than manipulating its contents and putting it conveniently in the way, to be read in that condition. This is very awkward, considering that he is her husband. Somehow one

can't do good without doing mischief. One can't get her into a right state of mind without getting her into a wrong one. But then I have to choose between two evils, and there is no doubt as to which is the least. If she goes on in this way, she will become an infidel; for she knows where the truth is, yet she can't, or thinks that she can't, believe what she knows, unless she recovers her belief in Lord de Freville, which she can't do without despising the man who cheated her into marrying him. But she despises him already as much as possible—nothing can be clearer than that—and so she can't despise him more, and so no harm can be done. So in fact there is only one evil, and that would be to hold my tongue."

"Are you quite sure," she said, "that all the letters went? and that none were written to you in Italy, except what you received? I am not accusing anyone."

"The courier has not gone yet. I can find out from him. I wrote no letters to England from Florence just then, but to one person."

She rang the bell sharply. Her maid came running in, alarmed at the continuous loudness of the peal, and summoned the courier, who felt rather surprised, but maintained the outward placidity that befitted his calling.

"Do you happen to remember posting a letter for me at Florence on the 11th of October? You could see by your book."

He left the room, and, returning with the book, said:

"There is no entry of any English letter on the 11th," he said. "On the 12th I put a stamp

on a letter that you gave me, and I was going to post it, when the Marquis followed me down the stairs, and gave me another instead, saying it was a mistake and that you had sent him with the right one. He took mine away. They were both for Mylord de Freville."

"Do you happen to remember posting another for me, three weeks afterwards? You would have found it on the table."

"No, Madame la Marquise. I never saw that letter, and never heard of it till now,"

"Did any one besides yourself ever go to the post-office for letters? I ask because two or three from England were not, I believe, received, and I wanted to know whether they may have been lost or mislaid in that way, or whether it was the fault of the post."

"Latterly I did not go for the letters. I sprained my ancle, and the Marquis was so kind as to say that he would call for them, which he did till we left Florence."

"Did you go for them while we were in Rome?"

"Every day; but there were none. A telegram was brought, four days (I think) before—before you, Madame, left Rome. The Marquis took it from me, to take to Lady Dytechley. I think he must have mislaid or forgotten it, because her ladyship asked me about it afterwards, when Mr. Freville called. He told her that Sir Richard had telegraphed from Lyneham, and she sent for me to know what had become of it. The Marquis was very much engaged when it arrived, and must have mislaid or forgotten it."

"Yes, it was very likely to happen," said Ida,

with an emphasis of double meaning, one for the courier, and the other for herself. "I thank you for remembering it all so long afterwards. I shall always have great pleasure in recommending you. Good morning."

The courier bowed, and, thanking her for her good wishes, left the room.

"You were right," she said in a low voice that partly smothered its own sound of agony. "I have been deceived—but that is no word for it. No word, no multitude of words could express what has been done. Don't ask me to forgive it. I never can—never will. Yet how can I wonder at anything, feel anything, care for anything, when I have these written words before my eyes? Don't tell me that the missing half-sheet would alter their sense or do away with his own admission about the encounter in the lane and . . . the truth is too plain to be mistaken."

"Not with two pages between that might change the meaning of everything completely," said Mrs. Atherstone. "But I am not going to tell you any more, for you are not in a fit state of mind, and I should only do harm by staying any longer."

"So you are going to desert me, like the rest. Why did I imagine that any one could understand me now, when I scarcely understand myself?"

"You poor unhappy child!" said Mrs. Atherstone, pressing her hand with the vigour of early days, "I understand you as thoroughly as one human being can understand another. Can't I make you believe that I have been young like you, loving passionately like you, hopeless like

you? I can feel for and with you, because I know what a woman can feel when the hope of her young life has been crushed; and I go, because it is better for you that I should. You will be better alone just now. Think of what we have made out of those two half-sheets and the missing sheet, and what the courier told you. Think over it alone at your leisure, and come to Hazeley, or send for me, whenever you feel that I can be of use to you. I shall always be ready and anxious to help you at any time and in any way that experience and affection (if I may say so on so limited an acquaintance) may suggest. I must go now. The carriage will be moving about in front, for I told the coachman to put up for half an hour and then come round. Remember that I do understand you, and feel intensely for you."

"I will," said Ida, "I do. I can't express myself, but I feel your kindness much more than you think. Tell me one thing. What do they mean by talking as if he were ill? I heard Sir Roger Arden saying that his dining at Bramscote might kill him; and there was a man at Lyneham, I don't know who, talking in the same way, but not so clearly, to Mr. Sherborne. I heard it while I was waiting for a fly."

"I don't know what they said," answered Mrs. Atherstone, opening the door; "but I know that he has been seriously ill. Don't forget to write or send, whenever I can be of use to you."

She shut the door, and Ida, walking back to the window, examined the half-sheets again.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AFTER repeated delays and much grumbling, Hubert mounted at twelve o'clock and rode off unwillingly, to be in time for the archæologists at Bramscote.

"Don't forget to stand by Sir Roger in his extremity," said Everard, who had come out to speed his departure: "and if they puzzle you with big words, fall back on a principle. The less they understand it, the better it will serve the purpose."

"I wish they were—somewhere else," answered Hubert, looking back. "I don't wish them any harm; but I had rather be with you, talking to old Barnes."

"I particularly wanted not to leave him alone to-day," he added mentally; "and that is the very head and front of their offending."

Everard went into the house, and talked for some time to old Barnes the steward, who had come from Beynham with that intent. When Barnes had gone, some one else took up his time till luncheon was ready. By two o'clock all necessary employment was over, and then he began to feel what his meeting with Ida meant. The enormous effort had braced him up to the utmost limit of endurance, and he seemed able to bear anything while the tension lasted, as, for a while,

it naturally did by the force that made it. There was no necessity now for that effort, no necessary work for him to do, and he was alone. He walked out, came back again directly, and after standing for some moments in the hall, strangely irresolute, went to the stables. Then he ordered his horse and looked in. The first object he saw was the dark chestnut. He shivered and passed out.

"No, I won't ride," he said. "Did I say that I would? How very odd!"

The last words were said to himself, as he wandered back towards the house: but while he uttered them they lost all meaning in his mind. He had forgotten the stables and the dark chestnut, and every external object, except Ida as she was now, as he had last seen her, as she had looked and spoken then. A mist was around him, but not as he had ever seen one, not as the eye sees what is naturally before it. The outer world was not obscured, but excluded. The whole space before him was void, except in one place. The image of Ida stood out as from a distant background of cold light. The image grew more vivid, the light colder, and the remembrance of her words became a sound—an echo whose tones were more intense than when they fell from her lips. The old coachman went by and said something about one of the horses. Everard looked up and answered absently:

"Yes, I had forgotten. I shall ride presently, at three o'clock. No! what o'clock is it? In about an hour, I mean."

"That isn't like him," thought Sandford. "We're never easy about him now."

Then some one wanted to see him. He answered, "No, I can't—I really can't," and went into the gallery. There the impression grew more and more distinct, the story it unfolded more heartbreaking, more terrible, more prophetically hopeless. This after-impression of their last meeting showed that, even when he saw her in Rome dressed as another man's bride, he had not heard all. He had lost her then, and the fact was crushing the life out of him; but he knew that—and life seemed now a shadowy thing, marked only by its end. He had known since that her heart, in its bitterness, was closed against the Faith once hers, and once again; but there was a cause for that, a cause that need not, would not last. He had yet to learn that she was rejecting all truth, consenting to reject it, and he had learnt this at Bramscote, read it in her face, heard it from her own lips. Was this to be the end of all that he had hoped in Ida and with her, the last thing that would be known to him in the story of their separated lives?

"I could bear anything, everything, except that," he said aloud, looking out of the western bay by force of habit. "I can face what I have had to bear; for life is passing perceptibly, and its hopes are a solemn anachronism now. But to think of her as she was and as she is, to know that *his* or *their* work, I know not which, goes beyond the lives they have sacrificed—beyond? The massacre of the innocents was mercy compared with this."

He staggered back from the window, and knelt before a crucifix that was on the writing-table.

"Oh! my God!" he exclaimed in his agony, "help me, or I shall go mad. If I have ever tried to do Thy will, ever struggled with myself to do it, grant this one prayer—let me suffer for her. She has suffered so much for me, and suffering has unsettled her will. Let me have her share, and more. I have heard that suffering accepted strengthens prayer. I pray for her with all the will I have. Let me suffer more, live on to suffer, live but to suffer for her and pray for her. I ask nothing for myself—nothing for her, except the grace of conversion. Thou knowest that she has been the victim of tyrannous and continued fraud. Oh! my God and Saviour, who didst, in Thine infinite love, die on the cross to redeem sinners, give her strength to overcome the difficulties into which that fraud has plunged her soul. Grant to her the gift of faith."

He rose unsteadily from his knees, and sinking down exhausted on the nearest seat, remained in the same position so long, that any one seeing him there might have questioned whether he was alive or dead. At length he moved a little and looked about, as one who wakes up at a sudden sound. There was no colour in his face, but a strange calmness, as of hope given. He took up a book, read a little without attention, and shut it.

"There is that man who wanted to see me," he thought, crossing the room and ringing the bell. The man had gone away an hour ago.

"So long!" he said. "I am sorry for it. Send and ask him to come again this evening, if he can. Didn't I tell Sandford that I would ride? I am not sure. Say I shall be out directly."

It was one of those rare May days that anticipate summer and retain the freshness of spring. The sun was powerful rather than hot, the air balmy and bracing, the light brilliant without glare. Songs of many birds filled the old pleasure-ground with melodies made one by nature's art, and the warm monotone of an early bumble-bee hummed a rich pedal note as he flew slowly by the open window. Everard looked and turned away.

"Not for me now," he said. "Harmony of sound, form, colour, fragrance, vital forces. All is life and promise of life. All is growing and life-giving, and has its own proper work here, its own future. I have loved it so much, associated it so much and so constantly with all that I ought to tear from my heart—and cannot . . . Didn't I order the brown mare? I can remember nothing this afternoon. I think I must have asked the question before of some one. And then I was here an hour (so they said) and thought it was a few minutes."

He went into the hall, meaning to ride, and looked through one of its windows on his way, to see if the horse was at the door. The brown mare had not yet appeared, but a carriage was passing under the gatehouse. He went slowly back to the gallery, not wishing to see the visitors and not caring to avoid them.

The old butler came in, and stood in an obstructive attitude, looking reluctant and anxious.

"There's a lady at the door, my lord," he said, "who doesn't give her name. She left the carriage by the gatehouse, and I can't see her face for her veil—or two veils there must be."

"It must be that Italian woman," thought Everard, "come in a Lyneham fly to ask for more money, which I am not going to give her. Does she want to see me?" he said.

"Yes, my lord, but I wouldn't see her if it was me. There's something"——

"No. It may be of some use to her, perhaps, or to somebody. I don't like refusing to see any one."

"Well, my lord, if it *must* be."

In a few minutes the lady was shown into the gallery. A double veil of dark gauze hid the whole of her face. A thin white cloak hung on her shoulders loosely.

"Ida!" he exclaimed in a tone that startled them both. "If you ever"——

"I *was* called so," she said, putting aside her veil, "and I pass for the same person still. I wonder you remember me. I don't think you did yesterday. But I see that my presence annoys you. Let me ask one or two questions—they will not take long—and you shall be rid of it for ever."

He put a chair by her. She hesitated for a moment, and sat down.

"Did you receive a letter that I wrote from Florence on the 12th of October, asking and imploring you to come there immediately?"

Everard struggled with himself desperately to keep up an appearance of calmness.

"No," he said, "I never received it at all—never heard of it."

"Never? I wrote in such dreadful distress about what they had said of you, and begged you to come, and said that my mother wished you to come."

"No. I never heard from you after the 12th of October, until the end of November."

"But Elfrida wrote me word that you had received it, and that you were out of spirits, and my mother said it was because you couldn't answer the thing."

"No. I received a letter written by you on the 11th of October—I am sure of the date, because I read it very often; but there was nothing in it about coming to Florence, nothing about an answer to any question whatever. I am at a loss to imagine, or even guess, what your mother meant."

"But you never wrote to me"——

"I wrote four times to Florence after that; and then your mother said, in a letter to Elfrida, that it would be useless to write any more, because you would be leaving Florence directly, and moving from place to place on the way home. I wrote, however, again on that day, in hopes of catching you somewhere."

"And you never heard from me? Why didn't you come to see? If you had cared, you would."

"Because your mother told me at Netherwood, the last time I saw her, that I must not follow you abroad, and insisted on it afterwards in her letters. She said that, if I did so, she would put off the —— she said two years, and promised at the same time that otherwise she would come back as soon as possible. She promised afterwards, more than once, that she would be at home by the end of November. I have her letters. She had made *such* a point of my not following you abroad, that

I went to the extreme limit of endurance, and made up my mind that I would wait till then, but not a day longer. Hubert was to have gone to Florence, or wherever you might be, and then, if necessary, I should have put forward your rights and mine in such a way that it could no longer have been set aside. He would have started for Florence on the 30th of November, but early that morning"—

"Not to follow us abroad? And she said she would return by the end of November? Did she write it? Are you sure?"

"By the end of November, at the very latest; and then it should be immediately. She wrote it twice—three times. The letters are here. You have a right to know the whole truth, and I have a right to tell it."

He opened a despatch-box that was on the writing-table, and taking out a small bundle of letters tied together put them into her hand. When she had glanced at them, he said:

"Hubert would have gone some time before, but he was detained at Beynham, and, as your mother had sent me word not to be uneasy if I received no letters from either of you while travelling home, I was satisfied for a time. To entrust any one else with such a delicate mission as that would have been out of the question. It rested between him and myself, and I determined that, in the event of his being detained any longer, I would set out myself on the 30th. He came; but I had gone already, in consequence of a letter received that morning—a letter from you, telling me to come as quickly as possible, because there

was some report against me, that your mother would otherwise believe. There was no date inside, but the post-mark was 'Florence.' I set off at once on horseback, rode across country to Lyneham (the pace killed my horse) and jumped into the express as it was moving off. I travelled day and night to Florence, found that you had gone, and followed you to Rome."

Ida started up, and her eyes looked piteously into his for an instant. Then she walked up and down the gallery without speaking.

Everard rose when she left her chair, and remained where he had risen, struggling with himself to look away from her.

"To Rome!" she said at last. "To Rome, and again made too late. Too late, and through *him*—I know it was. The letter you received then was the letter I asked you about. I wrote it on the 12th of October. He must have changed it with the other, and kept it back, and posted it afterwards—posted it just in time to be too late. Do you see the calculating treachery, the abominable false-heartedness, the diabolical refinement of cruelty?"

"Don't ask me that," said Everard hoarsely. "Let it be sufficient that, by the mercy of God, his soul is not on my conscience, as it nearly was then. Don't force me to plead for him as your husband. He is, and I must accept the fact, you the duties; but I am not called upon to do more, unless it be for your sake, for your good. Tell me if it is so, but spare me if you can."

She heard the words only. The voice, the tones, were lost in the tumult within.

"Plead for *him*?" she said. "If you could do it, do you think that I could listen? You never *would*, never *could* have said so, if you had ever felt as I felt and (will you make me say it?) do feel."

"Do feel? Ida! Don't tempt me beyond endurance to say what I *do* feel."

"How can I believe you, when my mother told you that she should consider us disengaged, and you said nothing."

"And you were told *that*? And you could believe it? I said nothing, because she refused point-blank to listen, and left the room directly afterwards. In a few minutes I had a note from her, telling me that she had not meant what she said. Elfrida, who brought it, asked me what had happened, and I told her. I should have written to you about that, and many other things, if I could. You well know why I did not."

"I do. But you never came to see me, when I wrote to say we were going that Wednesday. I walked for two hours between the lodge and the village, waiting for you."

Everard turned away for a moment, and then answered with apparent calmness, "I never received it."

"Again! and *he* was there. Did you never hear, never suspect?"

"I heard long afterwards that it had been—mislaid and forgotten."

"And who told you?"

"The person who—forgot it."

"And do you believe that it *was* forgotten?"

"Yes, I did."

"I ask if you *do*: but never mind. I ought to have known, from the letter you wrote to him, that you never did and never could have cared for me. Why did I want to know what became of the others, when this—do you know it?"

She took two half-sheets out of a silver bag that hung from her waist, held them up before him, crumpled between her fingers, and thrust them into his hand.

"I remember writing it," he said, "and copying it. The copy is in that box. I copied it, because I had to refuse him a favour, and thought it prudent to place on record the reason why I did so. He had asked me to persuade my little brother's nurse, Charlotte Wilcox, to return to Italy, his servant having already tried to carry her off by force."

Ida's lips became white and rigid. "Then that was the girl in the lane?" she said.

He listened, for the sound was hardly articulate. She pointed to the letter that was in his hand. He ran his eyes over it as far as the words, "*I don't care and cannot see the beauty you speak of.*"

"Who has done this?" he said, and his brow darkened as when the Marquis confronted him in Rome. "There are two pages gone, and the meaning changed in such a way, that the thing must have been done on purpose."

While saying this, he had opened the box on the writing-table and pulled out the copy. Ida snatched it from him, and read as follows:—

"My dear Marquis—

"I have been with Sir Richard all the morning, and shall be out all the afternoon; so that I should have put off answering your letter till to-morrow, had it been a less important one.

"The serio-comic affair in the lane was really nothing, as far as I am concerned. The two roughs never hit me at all, and their leader began to squeak as soon as he was touched. The poor thing was frightened, of course, but is not the worse for it.

"I am sorry to disoblige you, but I cannot use my influence to persuade her to return to Italy, nor can I send her away. Looking at her past history, I can only see that she has a right to my protection as long as she claims it. That protection she shall have.

"You are correct about the light you saw one evening in the tower. She was concealed there then, but now lives openly in my house with the servants, and cannot possibly be a cause of suspicion (as you suggest she might) to Miss Dytechley. But I really do not care

Second leaf of first sheet, torn off, and missing.

to tell her such a long story in a letter, when I can do so, much more advantageously for your reputation, after her return. Another motive disinclines me to write to her about it. She has had a great deal of worry and anxiety, and, were she to know of this encounter, I am afraid that it would frighten her about me, in spite of whatever I might say to remove the impression. You may set your mind at rest with regard to the reports you speak of in reference to the death of my little brother. Nobody believes them, except

perhaps two or three old women in Chase End, who are ready to believe anything against any one.

"Sir Richard is recovering fast, and begs me to thank you for your kind inquiries. He was much amused by your news about the red-whiskered man, whose name I must try to remember, now that (as you tell us) he is going to be married, and who has just succeeded to a small property, with a delapidated but remarkably interesting old house on it. Sir Richard desires me to say that he met the lady once at Bramscote,

Second sheet, first leaf.

Blank leaf torn off.

*and cannot see the beauty
you speak of, but as she
seems likely to be a good
wife, and her fortune will
help to keep up the old place,
one must say, according to
the adage, 'handsome is as
handsome does.'*

*"In great haste.—Believe
me, yours very sincerely,*

"Everard Freville."

Ida read on to the last word. Then a terrible cry burst from her lips, followed by a low wail that seemed as if it would have no end. The letter fell from her hand, and lay for a little while on the floor. But as yet the truth had only struck her like a sudden blow, a shock that stuns where it reaches. It unfolded itself by degrees, and grew under the light, as colours come out at daybreak; yet the whole had appeared within the space of a few seconds, that came and went like the quick passing of a dream whose end is the beginning of its realisation.

She threw herself wildly before him, and fell heavily as if she were dead.

"Everard, I shall go mad," she shrieked, as he raised her up, "I must. I have distrusted you, betrayed you, killed you. But if you only knew"——

She shed no tears, but sobbed convulsively in paroxysms fearful to see. He supported her to a chair, bent over her for an instant, and with an effort known to God only, drew back.

"I do know," he said, and his voice trembled so much that no one but herself could have distinguished the words; "I do know. I know all. I never blamed you, even when I knew nothing. How could I, now? I wrote a letter some weeks ago, telling you that I did not, and showing the cause. Hubert has it."

"Oh! why couldn't he give it to me, or let me know where to come for it? I would have travelled from one end of the earth to the other for it. I thought you had deserted me, and I grew so dreadfully wicked. If I had but seen that letter! How could he be so cruel?"

"It was not his fault. I told him to give it later."

"Why later? I don't understand. What could happen to make one time different from another?"

"He was to give it after I was dead. We had been unnaturally divided in life: it was fitting that my last words to you should come from the grave."

She neither spoke nor moved. Her eyes looked up into his for a moment, as if to read his whole meaning; then the colour of her face changed from pale to ghastly white, and its expression became fixed, as if intelligence were being crushed out by the pressure of one thought.

"God help me! she is going mad," he said, "and I can do nothing to save her." The words had escaped in sound, and in escaping warned him that she would hear them. She heard and listened.

“You do and always did everything that is right and perfect,” she said, “everything. It was all my fault, my miserable fault. No, I am not mad now. You have saved me by showing that you care for me still. But is it true what they said? Oh! do try to live. I can’t survive you long, and I am too wicked to die. Yes, I am. You don’t know what things I have said and thought, and how I turned away from the faith because I would not believe in anything unless I could believe in you—and how hard I grew—worse and worse, till I didn’t know myself, and fancied that I believed the dreadful things I said. Everard, do have pity upon me! Don’t drive me from you quite. I can’t bear it, I can’t indeed. I shall go on disbelieving, if you do—I can’t help it. I would if I could, but I lost the power by that one fatal act. I have been very wicked, I know I have. I see it all so clearly now, and I shall fall into utter despair unless you help me. I made that awful vow recklessly, hating the whole world, and disbelieving in all good because I had lost all hope. There is no hope for me now, no mercy, if you leave me to myself. I cannot be where he is. I told him so after I had seen you that fatal day in Rome, when he tried to kill you, when I saw him—yes, I saw him try to murder you before my eyes. I have never spoken to him since, nor ever stood in the same room with him. I sent him a message that evening to ask which way he meant to go next day, as I was going in the opposite direction. He took the hint, and I have never seen him since. I never will go anywhere near him. Oh! you

know it—ask yourself, ask your own heart how could I ?”——

“Don’t ask me—don’t, I implore you,” said Everard. “You don’t know what you are saying.”

“I never, never will go anywhere near him ; and if you tell me I must, I shall die in despair. Let me live in some cottage of yours, where I can think that you are near, and see you sometimes, without being seen, as you are riding by. Oh ! Everard, Everard, have pity on me ! Save me !”

A stifled groan was the only possible answer. Must he let the powers of evil finish their work ? Must he desert her because treachery had triumphed ? Must all that remained of their one life be destroyed, crushed out, annihilated ? Must he turn away from Ida—appealing for protection in her greatest need, by right of her immense love, her blighted life, her sufferings through and with him ?

She stood up for an instant and fell on her knees before him. He tried to lift her up ; but she clung to the massive arm of the carved oak chair, refusing to rise.

“Do believe me,” she repeated. “Oh ! do, do believe me. Don’t drive me from you—I must go mad, if you do. Everard, if you would not drive me to die in despair, have pity on me ! Let me be somewhere, anywhere, near you. I care not where it is, if I can only feel that I am near you, and may see you sometimes in the distance. *Do* tell me that I may. I promise not to be in your way.”

"*In my way!*" he exclaimed in a voice that seemed literally to pierce the air. "Do you disbelieve still that I am as I was before we were swindled out of our one life? If human will, if human power, if human love—the most passionate and indestructible, could undo what is, no man living or yet to live should divide us for one moment of time."

A tinge of flickering colour was in his face during the space of one emphatic instant, and then faded into deadly white. He turned away and leant over the back of the chair. Ida started up.

"Oh! Everard, what is it?" she said. "Forgive me. Speak to me."

He turned slowly, and when he spoke, his voice was as if it came from far off.

"Ida," he said, "this tremendous crisis in our unnaturally separated lives requires that I should lay bare my heart before you. I have to speak in as few words as possible of all that concerns us now. It might be said that I have no right to do so; but, as things are, I have, because you have a right to hear it. I cannot express to you what I feel as a Christian without trying to express what I feel as a man. I say, try to express; because no possible combination of words could describe what I feel for you, with you, about you. Without the grace of the sacraments I should have killed that man or gone mad, and even now, when life is passing from me, and I have not an hour to reckon on as probably my own, the struggle is—but let that pass. You asked me to believe you, and I do believe you. I ask you to believe me."

"I do believe you," she said in a voice that was scarcely audible. "Don't think that I can't understand what you feel. I do, indeed. I couldn't be myself if I did not. But oh! Everard, I have killed you—I alone; for it could never have happened, if I had refused to believe the letter, as I ought. Yes—I ought, I ought indeed. I ought to have disbelieved it, if the whole world had sworn that it was true. Don't defend me. There is no excuse for me, none. And yet I should never have done it if I had not loved you so intensely. Oh! what can I do? All is dark and horrible. Is there nothing that I can do to save your life—the life that is so precious, the life that is mine by being yours? Tell me what to do, and I will do it, whatever it may cost. Only try to live. All the doctors tell one that, when the constitution is sound, the mind can do wonders. Do, do try to live!"

"I have done so, and I should do so now for your sake, if I had never tried before: but you must not be deceived about me again, in any way, on any consideration whatever. No, never again."

"No—a thousand times no!" she answered. "Whatever suffering it may bring on me, I must know all. Tell me the truth. I have killed you by being what I am through my own fault, my own mad and wicked folly."

"No," he said, "it was not your fault, not yours. Don't think that."

"But I know it is. I see it. Oh! God, my punishment is just, but it is more than I can bear. Everard, if I had not neglected your warn-

ing, all this would not have been. My mother would have had no inducement to go abroad, and we should have been happy now. But you don't yet know how it happened."

"I do. Elfrida told me about it when I was at Netherwood."

"Yes, but afterwards, while we were in Italy, I sometimes thought of going to the nearest church and asking for a priest; and then I was afraid of its being made a pretext for staying longer abroad. And so, when the trial came, I had no support, no one that I could put confidence in, no one to point out how easy it is to make up evidence against the absent. Oh! what an awful thing it is to put off confessing the Faith, for any cause whatever, when it has once been given to one. It seemed so natural then, but now I see how wicked it was."

"No, not wicked," he said. "The act must be measured by the intention, not by the consequences. The temptation not to do is much more subtle than the temptation to do. When one is tempted to do a thing, one sees, as it were, a picture of the act in one's mind, and the likeness is there, though it may be flattered; but not doing is like standing still, which may save us from evil, or keep us as we were, or leave us exposed to greater danger. But it matters little now, comparatively, how far accidents or omissions may have combined against us. They can do no more, for all has been done; but we can do what is in us to do—the one and only thing that remains. I say 'we,' because I cannot find it in my heart to speak otherwise, though you alone can

decide and act. Let our life be one still, as far as may be in this world, now so desolate for us both, one in the One Faith taken from you by the falsehood that divided us—one in the One Hope that no man can destroy. We *must* be one, in this—the only way that remains for us here, by the only means that can outlast and conquer time, by the only means that can avail when the grave has closed over our immeasurable grief. This is all that remains to us—all. We must face the terrible fact : we must accept the bitter trial, the total destruction of our life's hope on earth. Ida, I should be utterly unable to part from you now, couldn't endure it, *must* break down and say, ' You are mine, and I cannot live without you,' were it not for the One True Faith which tells me that I—that *we* must endure to the end. The end will be soon. . . . the End that really is the great Beginning—when the All now remaining to us, that seems to be so little, so hard to realise, will prove to be Everything and for Ever."

" Take me where I can learn to understand that we are still one," said Ida. " Take me now. But, no! I am not in a right state of mind. I should be doing it for human love, not for the love of God. If I had only done His will when I might. But now He will reject me. I am too late."

" No. That is the old story, which the devil tells us when we have fallen and seek to rise. The human motive is there, of course—how could it possibly be absent from either of us? But if you ask yourself the question fairly, you will find that

the higher motive is sufficient. Suppose yourself at Netherwood, years ago, and suppose that I had died without ever having had an opportunity of expressing any wish about it, and suppose yourself to see the truth, and feel the necessity just as you do now. Could you say honestly that the higher motive, which must then have been the only one, would not be sufficient?"

"No—I see. The higher motive is sufficient. But I am so unfit now. I have no power to fix my mind on God. I am so absorbed in my own misery, and so impatient. I can't—I can't reconcile myself to"—

"We can only accept it as permitted by God, who knows the heart, and requires nothing beyond our strength."

"Take me to the chapel," she said. "I should like to see Father Merivale there. Ask him to come. Send after him wherever he is. I must see him."

They left the room together. When they entered the chapel she looked at the holy water stoup, then at him, and said:

"Won't you give it to me?"

He did, and they knelt side by side.

"Will it do, if I pray with my heart only?" she said. "I can't find words to express what I feel."

"Yes, indeed it will, better than any other way."

"I felt as if it would. Stay by me and help me. But first ask him to come."

He went out by the door that led into the presbytery. Father Merivale, who was just going out on rather urgent business, turned back.

"She—Ida is there, waiting to see you," said Everard. "Of your charity come, whatever you may have to do."

"*Deo gratias!* His prayers have done this," thought Father Merivale as he turned back.

Everard followed him into the chapel and knelt by the side of Ida a few seconds. He then led her to the confessional and returned to his place. How long she remained there he knew not, for the time had no continuity in his mind. It was filled with one long aspiration, whose intense oneness excluded the idea of measure till she returned and again knelt by him. After a while she rose, and going out with him by the principal door, walked slowly towards the gatehouse, where the carriage was waiting.

"You were right," she said. "The higher motive was sufficient. I felt it while I was kneeling with you there. A feeling came over me so new, and yet so natural. I knew it to be the same that I should have felt nine months ago, if I had not turned back when the happiness of our life hung on one act of mine. That feeling, so new and yet so natural, has given me strength, and I have need of it more than ever. I am tearing myself away from you while I am able. Don't let me stay. Only give me your rosary—your own—the one you always use."

Everard took the rosary out of his pocket and put it into her hand, without speaking.

"You are so dreadfully calm," she said. "You frighten me. You are ill. Oh! Everard, Everard! what have I done?"

"Everything for me," he answered in a very

low voice, "everything! What you see is but the stillness that marks the end of a great struggle. I can see the same in you. We have both had a great, a fearful struggle—how great no one but God and ourselves can know. We must pray for each other. Pray for me now, and pray for me when I am dead."

"Yes—always, without ceasing while I live: but it will not be for long. I shall see you once more. It will be at Elfrida's wedding. It is right that I should see you there for the last time, there in the little church where I might have—Oh! Everard, Everard, it is I that have need of prayers. Pray for"——

The next word broke into a sob that no effort could restrain. One piteously lingering look, and she was gone. He saw her draw the thick veil over her face as she hurried away, and then he saw nothing. He stood under the arch of the gatehouse until the last echo of the carriage-wheels had died away in the distance: then he turned, as if mechanically, and walked back to the house.

Half an hour afterwards Hubert rode into the courtyard. Seeing the brown mare led up and down in front of the door, he looked at his watch and said, as he dismounted, "I suppose he has just come in. Is he going out again? If so, I shall ride with him."

"His lordship said he was coming out; but that must be two hours ago," answered the groom. "The mare has been waiting since three o'clock."

"Where is he?" said Hubert, and without waiting for an answer, he rushed into the house.

Everard was lying on the floor of the gallery

near the western bay, apparently dead. His left arm was stretched out as if he had made some slight effort to save himself. The right lay across his breast. In his hand was a lady's glove: it was Ida's. He had found it on the ground, a moment before he fell, and he grasped it still.

CHAPTER XLIV.

LONG before Mass Ida was in the little church at Netherwood, and remained there long afterwards. Elfrida waited till she came out, and said as they left the door :

“Ida, what a happiness is this ! What has done it ?”

“Say rather, ‘*who*’ has—— ? There is only one who could. I saw him yesterday. I went there. I went to confession in that chapel, and then I asked if I might make my first communion without delay—this morning : and Father Merivale told me that, under the circumstances, and being so well instructed, I might. That was partly the reason why I went upstairs after dinner. I must see you alone by and by, for I have things to say that I cannot speak of before others. And then you will tell my father ; for until he knows all, he must think—but don’t ask me anything now. Don’t notice me just now.”

“Dear Ida, dearer than ever, I understand you perfectly,” said Elfrida, pressing her hand as they walked on. “You are right, and I think you had better not appear at breakfast. You have had no sleep, I can see, and you want rest. I shall tell my mother so, and come to you after breakfast,

when she is writing her letters. Slip upstairs when we go in, and leave the rest to me."

Further on, they saw Sir Richard walking quickly down the road. He appeared to be on the look-out for some one. When he was within twenty yards of them, a groom trotted by and pulled up on one side of him. As they approached they heard him say :

"I couldn't see Mr. Freville. He was with his lordship. They told me that Dr. Ranston got there by half-past two this morning. He says he can't tell yet how it will be. His lordship was no better when I came away."

Sir Richard turned homewards, calling out to the groom, who was riding on :

"Get the dogcart round as quick as you can." And then muttered to himself : "We have killed him among us. I shall never get over it. God grant I may be in time to see him alive !"

Elfrida ran up to Sir Richard, and said : "What is it ? Tell me for pity's sake."

"Hubert found him yesterday, between five and six o'clock, lying on the floor of the gallery. It was an attack of the heart. He has not spoken since. I heard it last night, and sent over this morning to inquire. That is all I know."

"How did you hear it ? Did Hubert send word ?"

"He was going to do so, but the man who went for your parcels to Lyneham station saw one of the Freville Chase grooms galloping up, and asked what was the matter. He said he had come to telegraph for Dr. Ranston, and had orders to ride on here afterwards. But our man

(I forget who it was) said he would bring the message, for the horse seemed quite done. Don't keep me. I am going there as soon as I can get off."

Ida had followed them. "I have heard it," she said to Elfrida with the calmness of one in whose grief there can no longer be a more and a less. "Has he been so before?—I mean on *that day* when he came to me in Rome too late? Elfrida, if I were not a Catholic, if I had not prayed by his side yesterday in the chapel at Freville Chase, and received the sacrament of penance there, and received the Body and Blood of my Saviour and my God this morning"——

She walked on and presently repeated the words, "Has he been so before?"

"Yes, in Rome," said Elfrida, "and at Freville Chase when he first came home."

Ida drew her veil down as she passed the lodge, and said: "Yes, it first happened on that day, after he had seen me, because he had seen me. Don't tell me it wasn't so."

"It did," answered Elfrida. "The dreadful journey after that ride"——

"Yes, he told me. But that alone could not have been the cause. It is I who have killed him. You know that; but you don't know how my letters and his letters and your letters were stolen, and one of his torn in half, to alter the sense, and how"——

"Dearest Ida," said Elfrida, looking at her anxiously, "I can believe it all. I understand only too well how it was, and who did it. But tell me when I come to your room. Don't say any more now."

When they had nearly reached home Sir Richard drove by.

"Oh! if I could but go in it," exclaimed Ida. "If I might only see him once more!"

"Remember that he recovered in Rome," said Elfrida, taking her by the hand and leading her into the house. "There is more hope now than there was then. You must see that there is, if you compare what he knew about you then with what he knows about you now."

When Elfrida appeared at breakfast and Ida did not, Lady Dytchley, knowing why Sir Richard had gone to Freville Chase, made no remark, and continued to do so. After breakfast Elfrida went to Ida's room and heard her most pitiful story. She remained there till twelve o'clock undisturbed; and then the disturbance lasted no longer than the opening of the door. The visitor was Mrs. Atherstone.

"How very kind of you," said Ida faintly. "I wanted to see you so much. I was going to send a note. You don't know all you have done for me. In consequence of what you said yesterday I went to Freville Chase—you will not blame me for that, will you?—and I heard all, told all. Here is a copy of the whole letter, his dear letter, as he sent it. See how right you were, how the meaning was changed by keeping back the middle part and making two sentences one, so that my father's innocent little message about a stranger looked like Everard's words about me. Just compare the whole letter with the two half-sheets (here they are), and see how it was done."

Mrs. Atherstone read the letter, and then

compared the original passage with the united two.

"I expected something of the kind," she said, "Poor dear child! You have been fearfully tried."

"It was my not hearing from him afterwards, when I had every reason to feel certain that he had received at least the first of my two miserable letters. But don't try to excuse me. There is no excuse. I ought to have trusted him against the whole world. What was the evidence of his handwriting, compared with the evidence of himself as I knew him to be? I tell you, that if I had heard the words from his own lips, I ought not to have believed them. I ought to have said, 'This is not himself. It is a delusion.' No, no. There is no excuse, none whatever!"

"My dear, your feeling is natural and good; but I have lived so much longer than you. Confidence in a beloved object is like a canal between high banks: the smallest leak, if not stopped at once, will cause a flood."

"Yes, but it never ought to want stopping, never ought to be. What is the use of certainty, if a breath is to call it in question? It never could have been, if I had not neglected the One Great Certainty. Don't make any excuse for me—please don't. You are so very, very kind, and so wise; but don't, I entreat you. Speak of his wrongs, and how he has borne them; of his perfections, and how they have grown more perfect; of his love, and how I repaid it; of his true heart, and how I have broken it. Tell me that, and I will listen for ever; but don't stab me with kind words."

"I won't indeed—I promise not," said Mrs.

Atherstone tenderly. "But you will let me talk of something else. You spoke of having neglected the One Great Certainty, which can only mean the Faith—nothing is so certain as that—and by saying so, inferred that you are not inclined to neglect it now. I am an old woman, and I know what it is to have the Faith, and what it was to be without it. I hope I am right in my conjecture."

This turned the conversation, and kept it up for more than an hour, when it was broken off by the entrance of Lady Dytechley. Mrs. Atherstone then rose, and said to Ida :

"By the by, I was nearly forgetting my message. My niece, Mrs. Sherborne, is going to visit her sister in Brittany for six weeks. You have been asked there so often, she says, and as they are going, you could go and come back with them. You would be as quiet as possible, and the old chateau would interest you."

"Yes, do go, my dear Ida," said Lady Dytechley. "It would be the very best thing. You would then be returning here about the 1st or 2nd of August, and we should have a nice quiet month before the shooting begins."

"I will," said Ida, "if—if—— Tell Mrs. Sherborne from me how grateful I am to her for wishing to be burdened with me."

Mrs. Atherstone, looking at her watch, asked if she might ring for the carriage; but Lady Dytechley begged her with such abject earnestness to stay, that she consented. "For," said she to herself, "that great big creature is frightened out of her wits at the ruin she has made, and leans on a poor old woman like me."

During luncheon they spoke at intervals. After luncheon the intervals became more frequent. Lady Dytechley went with them into the library, remained there a short time, and then went out, pleading an engagement.

Mrs. Atherstone stayed till past five o'clock. As she drove away Hubert cantered up to the door, asked where Elfrida was, and springing off his horse, ran in. He caught sight of her and Ida as they were crossing the hall on their way upstairs. Ida guessed who it was, and turning towards him, said :

"Of your charity, tell me whatever is true about him."

Hubert bowed his head in reverence to her great sorrow. "I have come on purpose," he answered. "I was sent here to see you."

"Tell him," she said, "that I made my first communion this morning. Is there any hope of——? don't deceive me."

"The doctor has not said so : but I *must* think there is. I have seen him recover before : and there ought to be more reason now—there must be. You have done for him all that is now possible. You have fulfilled the one great remaining wish of his life. He charged me to tell you so. I have brought this letter, which was left with me for you three months ago, to be given later. He wrote it when he was very ill. Happily the cause of its being written has been removed by yourself ; but, for that very reason, I thought you would like to have it to-day."

"Thank you. I can't express how much I thank you," she said, clutching it between the

fingers of both hands. "And thank you for your kind words, though they stab me."

While speaking she had glided away to the nearest door, and before he could answer, she was gone.

"Poor, dear Ida!" he said. "What awful ruin they have made! But I have a message to give you from him, and I must go directly. You will understand why I can't leave him. Sir Richard is staying until I can get back. The message is that our wedding must not be delayed, not even for one day. He made a great effort to say those words and to give me the message for Ida. He wouldn't let Sir Richard bring the message, because he knew I should like to tell you myself."

"He wishes it, and that is enough for us," answered Elfrida. "But there must be no one here, no rejoicings. We couldn't bear that."

"No, indeed. I told your father so, and he said: 'Of course not. Every one must be put off.'"

He took Elfrida's arm and went with her to the front door, where his horse was waiting.

"You look so pale and haggard," she said, following him as he was beginning to ride away.

"It was only the shock," he answered, pulling up his horse. "I am not tired. I came into the gallery and saw him lying on the floor, to all appearance dead, with Ida's glove in his hand. And then he was eight hours in the same state, before Dr. Ranston came, and twelve hours more after that."

"But have you any hope of him now?"

"Sometimes I have. But the cause is permanent, and the effect accumulates. Oh!—If the author of it would only make an act of contrition, and then die of anything he likes. . . . One doesn't wish any one dead, particularly when he is one's uncle, which in this case is hard to realise; yet one can't help feeling that he only lives to destroy. He might save his soul, if he were to die now, broken down as he must be by the bitterest possible disenchantment. But I am talking wildly—I suppose from a nervous instinct of reaction. God help us all! I really don't know what to say, and hardly dare think at present. It is a hard thing to bear, and but for you, treasure of treasures, would be unbearable." He bent down in his saddle, kissed her hand, and cantered away. She stood watching him till he was out of sight, and then went back to Ida.

CHAPTER XLV.

TIME went on at its own unvarying pace, and proved many things, in its own quiet way, all over the world. It had tested in Lady Dytechley the precise value of self-assertion under difficulties, in Ida the strength and weakness of human love trusting in itself. It had seen Elfrida rise above her opportunities, and the Marquis Moncalvo sink below his, Hubert lose all, and gain by losing, Sir Richard become a decent Christian by having practically forgotten to be one at all. With regard to Everard the conclusion had yet to be shown. When Hubert and his bride arrived at Freville Chase from Beynham, a week after their marriage, he came out to welcome them, spoke cheerfully, and said to Elfrida, "I am all right, and all the better for seeing you;" but there were evident signs of suffering and of effort in all that he did. While they were at Beynham he had, in defiance of himself, not only planned fêtes and dinner-parties, to be given in honour of Elfrida, but fixed the days and sent out the invitations. Lady Dytechley took courage from the fact, and almost believed in herself again. To Elfrida it seemed like a last effort, and especially when she saw him; but, as he had thrown himself into it,

she felt that she must do the same, and she did so as soon as he mentioned the subject to her.

"I am so glad that you see the thing as it is," he said, when they met in the gallery before dinner. "But I knew you would. Ranston wanted to persuade me against it; but he was wrong. It ought to be done, and it will do me no harm. One can't get away from oneself by getting away from other people. You see, there are two reasons for doing it. In the first place the bride must appear in character and costume, and as I am proud of her"——

"For all that isn't her own doing, but yours entirely," interrupted Elfrida.

"Then you had no free will, I suppose," he said, "and you thought your way into the Church without thinking, and saved Hubert in Paris because the driver of a fiacre took you to the Bois de Boulogne. I *am* proud of you, and have reason to be so. And besides, you are a bride, *the* bride, the bride of this house; and the parties must be given in your honour. Then again, I am glad to have this unanswerable reason for showing some hospitality in the neighbourhood—which, but for you, I couldn't possibly do now, nor imagine myself trying to think of doing. Here it is, all written down. It would have been arranged better, if I could have consulted you; but, to tell the strict truth, I was afraid of your making a row, unless it was settled before you heard of it. You see, the invitations to the dinner-parties ignore all local weights and measures. Here, for instance, is a man who thinks much of himself and little of this other one—for no conceivable reason except that

he bought a larger property out of iron than the other man did out of silk. I have marked him down to take out the other man's wife, and you must make much of him by making more of her. It may help him to appreciate her, not as much as she deserves, but as far as his own measure of things will go; and if it does, he will see the reflection of it in himself. You will be able to make him see it so, I think, for various reasons. First, you have all the qualities requisite. Secondly, you have special privileges as a bride. Thirdly, you have extra ones as a very young bride new in her authority. Fourthly, he and everyone will be kindly disposed, on your account and on mine. It will succeed, and ought to do good."

"You must give some lessons beforehand," said Hubert. "I should begin to think that you are a diplomatist spoilt, if you were not so very much more."

"I deny the positive as well as the comparative. Genuine diplomacy is above my grasp; and the other kind, with its doctrine of *faits accomplis*, would only entitle me to a high place among pick-pockets."

"I say that you have the powers of a genuine diplomatist—an imaginary being now, I suppose, because there is no place for one—and I know that I am right."

The butler came in to say that a person wanted to see Everard about a summons.

"Let me go," said Hubert. He left the room, and Elfrida said:

"Now tell me what else I have to do."

"Well, there are two people (here they are in

the list) who dislike each other a good deal, both in kind and in degree. You will have to make them talk pleasantly together."

"I am ready to attempt anything for you : but you must show me how."

"Well, I don't know what they quarrelled about, but, whatever it was, people made the difficulty go on by sympathising with one or other of them. You have only to seem ignorant of the fact, bring them together to look at some of the old embroidery work—we must have it put out as if by accident—and lay stress on the unanimity which, knowing very little about it, they will be obliged to express, for fear of committing themselves. You can then lead them on to talk of other things ; and, local good-humour assisting, they will perhaps lay the foundations of friendship and reconciliation."

"You must tell me something first about the embroidery—I am sorry they are ladies—that I may know what to say. But what else have I to do, besides ?"

"To make people aware of their own stupidity by an implied compliment on their wisdom. There is a lady (here is her name) living in a small house on the other side of Exbourne, that hardly anyone has called on, except myself, though she has been there nearly two years. She is well-born and badly off, highly cultivated and unassuming, writes charmingly without being sensational or morbid. These qualities in combination are against her. She might be poor, if she were not better born than some of the people who are better off, or she might be born as she is, if she

were not poor. She might be cultivated, or unassuming; but as she is both, neither are recognised, and her talent goes for nothing. Your plan will be to speak of her confidently and accidentally, as if you, of course, agreed with something expressed, implied, or understood. By agreeing with what they never meant you will make them agree with what you do mean. She has two daughters, who are comfortably above the average in every way, faces included. They are clever but not original, talk agreeably without going beyond anyone's range, play Wagner's music of the future with alarming emphasis, and are sufficiently plastic in their likes and dislikes to amalgamate with the majority—which is the first condition of being popular. Everyone will like them, without your taking any trouble about it beyond saying who they are. And now I have given you enough of this for one evening. Suppose we put it by now, and go on with the list some time tomorrow. By the by, here is one of her books."

"I should like to read it, as she is coming," said Elfrida.

"Do, and show that you have read it. Authors are too often supposed not to care for that sort of notice; but they care for it very much, particularly those who write fiction or poetry. They are necessarily sensitive, or they couldn't deal with feelings and passions, and they think much less of themselves, as a rule, than people give them credit for. Self-esteem is, no doubt, a very comfortable quality to possess, and may help a man to write a one-sided political pamphlet; but it isn't compatible with the poetic character,

especially in a woman. Well, then, to-morrow we shall have to work away down the list, and see what the other people are made of. Then there are the garden parties. I don't know whether I shall be thought mean; but my notion is, that they shouldn't be done expensively. I can't see what *raison d'être* champagne cup and lobster salad can have between luncheon and dinner; but I do see that the fashion of making such parties cost as much as possible is foolish and mischievous, a spur to extravagance and swagger, and an impediment to sociability. And then there is the big *fête* to consider, which must be the first, on account of the haymaking; but that is to be so big and inclusive, that discordant notes (if there are any) will be lost in the mass of harmony, as they are, in a limited degree, when the faithful take it into their heads to bawl the Litany at Benediction. We have only to amuse them and make them feel at home."

"And they will," said Elfrida. "People all do here."

"Still at it?" said Hubert, coming in. "And I have missed half the instruction."

"And make them feel at home," repeated Everard in a dreamy way, "and I think they will, of their own accord. One likes to make people happy, if one can, however little. One can do so little for any one."

"There is that strange transparent paleness again," thought Elfrida, "and worse than I have ever seen it."

"I am afraid you have begun to exert yourself rather too soon," she said. "Wouldn't it be

better to put off these parties a little? There is plenty of time. We are only at the beginning of June, and some of the people who are in the list of the dinner-parties won't be out of London till the end of July."

"The dinner-parties they are down for are later, and one of the garden-parties too," he answered, rousing himself a little. "If they don't begin, you see, they won't end—which you want them to do."

"But if they begin late they will only end later; and what is the harm of that? I don't think you are quite well enough yet."

"Seriously I am. What you see at this moment is nothing but what I have had fifty times at least since I came back from Rome. It will go off presently."

"Yes, but the best way to make it go off is to give yourself rest. No one but you would have dreamt of attempting, so soon after an illness, half as much as you have done."

"I don't see how they could, for there was nothing to attempt. But I hope you won't send me to bed without any dinner. I promise to hold my tongue continually till then; and it may be somewhat behind time; for I expect Father Merivale, who expected to miss his train from Ledchester. I am all right now though, as right as possible."

"But that terrible paleness is there still," thought Elfrida; "and it comes so often now."

CHAPTER XLVI.

IN a few days the bridal festivities began. The big fête was followed by dinners and garden-parties during the course of the next six weeks. Guests from the more distant parts of the country and from elsewhere were staying in the house, from time to time. When the last batch of these had gone there was to be an interval.

"I had hoped you would have some rest after all that you have done, and done so completely," said Elfrida to Everard at breakfast on the following morning; "but I am afraid that something troubles you—something in that letter."

"There is no reckoning on the amount of trouble that stupidity entails," answered Everard. "It affects everything except itself. In spite of plans and written directions, they are blundering about the building at Beynham. I don't like to act against Ranston's advice, after all that he has done for me; but I really must go there and see about it."

"Not yet, not yet, I entreat you. Hubert and I can go—go at once. To-day if you like. You have only to tell us what it is."

"Well, if you are not tired"—

"Not the least. I have had plenty of rest since

yesterday morning. I was only thinking of your birthday. Could we get it done, so as to be able to return before that? I am afraid not. The 6th of August is so near."

"Is that all? The matter is so important that, if there is really no other impediment, I hope you will go to-day. Besides, there is time enough between this and then. You have only to send for the builder, point out the mistakes, and remain just long enough to see them rectified, or fairly started on the way to being so. There can be no question about them, for I have written everything down, and can put all the papers into a leather box in two minutes. I will go and see after it now."

"I don't like going," said Elfrida, when he had left the room; "but there is no help for it. He would go if we didn't."

"I don't so much mind going this time," said Hubert. "He is so very much better, and more himself than he has been at all since—the beginning of it."

"Yes — much better;" she answered. Her eyes were turned away, and fixed on the ground.

He listened for more, but she remained silent.

"What is it?" he said. "You say he is much better, and yet"——

"He is too much better, and has become too quickly better. And there is that far-off, abstracted look in his eyes—I saw it first long ago, and I see it now so often—and the faint pink colour which comes and goes, and that trans-

parent paleness which never quite leaves him now. One cannot feel satisfied, knowing why it is, and why it all must be."

"Then we will not leave him. I can't hear of it—we can't. The building must take its chance."

"No, we mustn't think of that. It would distress him. He would go himself, which would be worse beyond all comparison. We must get through it as quickly as possible. And poor Ida is to come back from Brittany to-day with Mrs. Sherborne. They are expected to arrive at Hazeley about five o'clock, and I should like to have ridden over to see her. I must send a note."

"Here are the plans and the rest of it," said Everard, coming back into the room. "I can show you in a few minutes where the mistakes are. I don't think you can get off comfortably till after luncheon. I see there is a train now at half-past three: but that would bring you in so late. Hadn't you better wait till to-morrow?"

"If we go to-day, we shall gain a day," said Elfrida, "and we can see the man to-morrow, if you or Hubert write now to appoint him. And then we shall come back a day sooner."

"You dear, wise child," he said. "Of course you are right. Then so let it be."

And so it was. When the carriage came to the door, he said absently, "I wish they were not obliged to go. How little one is able to control anything." Then he went with them to the door. As he handed her into the carriage he kissed her forehead, and said, "Good-bye—pray

for me, and take care of yourself. Take care of yourselves, and each of the other : but you do and will always. God bless you, Hubert. I shall see you again soon. Good-bye. Let me have a line to-morrow. Drive on."

His eyes were fixed on Hubert wistfully as the carriage drove away. When it had passed the gatehouse, he turned and went back into the house.

Meanwhile Mrs. Roland was on the look-out behind the *portière*, and Anne was obtruding fragmentary remarks.

"But it's different now," she said. "Didn't he go and break into a cottage? That's burglary. And didn't he carry off Charlotte Wilcox? That's—I forget what it's called, but he could be transported, I know that. Joe Timson that lived by the"—

"He didn't, I tell you," said Mrs. Roland. "He's bad enough for anything, but he wasn't anywhere near at the time."

"Well it was his man then, and he ought to be took up, all the same. My lord is a magistrate, and can't help signing a warrant when they're brought up like that."

"No, he can't be brought up. That isn't it."

"Leave him to see about that. There now—there's my lord coming in. He'll be going out to ride presently, and then you'll wish you'd done it."

"If I could but tell him without saying who it is!" thought Mrs. Roland. "If I could only keep that dreadful name from him! Just the very

worst thing for him to know. But he must know it."

"He'll be gone out presently," said Anne, confronting her with rounded eyes, and pointing to Everard, who had walked up to a table where hats and riding-whips were many.

"But is Sandford quite sure that he saw him."

"Yes, he said he'd swear to it before all the judges and juries in the land, though he *did* look ten years older. And he's stopping at the Red Lion in Exbourne, all by himself, without a servant or anything, and we know he can't be come about here now for no good. Yes, ten years older, —but that's his conscience, what he's got of it, a-keeping on at him all the time. And you may depend of it, he's trying for a chance to shoot at his lordship behind a hedge."

"That will do now," said Mrs. Roland. "I know my duty. There is a proper time for everything."

She pushed the *portière* aside, and walking up to Everard as he was turning away, said :

"My lord, I must ask for a few moments before you go out. I can't put it off—indeed I can't."

"And why should you put it off?" he answered smiling. "What is it? You look troubled."

"Oh! my lord—I had rather do anything than say it. That wicked monster is about here; and when people have injured the good, they hate them all the more."

"Is he? Don't be alarmed. He has done the worst that he could do against me, and can do no more."

"Please, my lord," said Anne, who had been advancing unperceived, "he might shoot behind a hedge. Oh! do have him took up for a vagrant."

"Well, you see, I am afraid I have no power to do that: but I can make inquiries."

"It was Sandford saw him, my lord, and he's at the Red Lion in Exbourne," said Anne, retiring gradually and disappearing behind the *portière*.

"I can ask Sandford about it then, and find it all out," said Everard. "There is nothing to alarm you. One can easily get rid of any well-known man who skulks about, simply by letting him know that he is known to be doing so. Are you comforted now?"

"Yes, my lord, yes—I am. But do take care."

He went out, and she stood watching him from a window of the hall till he had passed out of sight.

"He has shown me what to do," thought Mrs. Roland, "and it shall be done this very day. I shall keep a man on horseback, and another on foot, following the Marquis, and waiting for him, and dogging his steps wherever he goes. I can get rid of him very soon, I warrant. I don't mind that, now I know what to do. It's that dear child—for so I always think of him, in a way, though he's such a man, every inch of him, that you don't see the like. It's what I see in him that makes my heart sink. I don't like the way he said 'Is he?' when I said who it was. He looked and spoke as though he had gone through it all, and was near the end. God's holy will be done! But it breaks my heart."

Everard went to the stables, but only to order

the brown mare. When she was led out, Sandford, after some visible hesitation, said :

"The roads are very bad Exbourne way, my lord, and very middling all about, regular broke up with the dry weather. There's a deal better riding in the Chase."

Everard understood the nature of the warning, and answered readily :

"Yes, the roads are not fit to ride on just now."

But he rode in the direction of Exbourne.

Sandford, who had saddled a horse beforehand, mounted and followed him at a distance, weighted, as to his coat-pockets, with a brace of old yeomanry pistols in which there were heavy charges of duck-shot.

Everard, all unsuspecting of these defensive preparations, rode down the Chase in company with his own thoughts, or rather his own purpose expressed.

"I can but try to save the miserable creature," he said to himself, "and judging by the message that Ranston brought me from him, I think there is just a chance. People will call it Quixotic perhaps, if not something less dignified. They are welcome to say so. A soul is worth more than their opinion. If I had never been taught to look below the surface of things, I might get out of it by supposing that a soul so degraded is incapable of rising from the abyss in which it has sunk itself. But what right has any one to suppose that, who knows how often he himself has fallen and risen, and how much deeper he might have fallen, if he had been as unprotected as so many others are? To say of any one that he cannot

rise, is to despise him; and such contempt is a feeling composed of ignorance, laziness, and ill-nature. God, who alone has the right to despise, does not. As the Bishop of Birmingham says (whether quoting or not I don't remember, but it sounds like his own), 'God despises no soul, however degraded, because He sees its capabilities.' Good and evil hold alternate sway over this wretched man, and evil, being privation, decreases the good more and more the longer it actuates him. I may or may not be in time, but there was no earlier time to choose. . . . He may have spoken falsely to Ranston, out of mere shame, and have come here in a spirit of reckless revenge. What if he has? . . . Is life so pleasant now, that I should shrink from an act of charity, to prolong it a little? Perhaps I am the least likely of all men to succeed; for in relation to me, he is the injurer by his own act, and the injured by a retributive disappointment that he now knows to have been certain from the date of his pseudo-triumph. But there is no one else to try, and I must and will see him, however he may take it. How shall I tackle him? What shall I appeal to first—his heart, his soul, or his sense of having a stronger will than his own to deal with? That will depend on how I find him disposed; but I must think over it and consider what I may have to say."

It was market-day at Exbourne, and several farmers, including two of his own tenants, were standing in front of the Red Lion. He spoke a few words to all of them, and then calling for the

landlord, said, "Isn't there a gentleman staying here—a stranger?"

"Yes, my lord: but he don't show much. I can't make him out—only that he's a gentleman. He doesn't give his name, and there's nothing on his luggage."

"I thought so. The fact is, I want to see him, whoever he is."

"Well my lord—of course, if you wish it, though he gave me strict orders not to admit anybody. But he isn't in just now, and won't be much before nine o'clock—that's when he comes in and dines. He stays out all day; and where he gets his luncheon, or whether he has any, I can't tell, nor where he goes to."

"Very well, then. I shall come again at nine o'clock this evening. Don't say anything about my coming."

He then talked a little more to the farmers, and rode away.


"I wonder what my lord wants with him," thought the landlord, as the brown mare turned the corner of the market-place, swishing her tail at the flies.

Everard was thinking of the day on which he had first been warned against the Marquis Moncalvo. "It was the beginning of—the end," he thought, "and the anniversary is to-day."

CHAPTER XLVII.

*" 'Courage !' he said, and pointed toward the land,
' This mounting wave will bear us shoreward soon.' "*

—TENNYSON.

OON after eight o'clock the landlord of the Red Lion began to look out for his mysterious lodger, and afterwards for the arrival of Everard.

" There's a something up," he thought, " or my lord wouldn't turn out at this time of day, ill as he has been, to see one that don't want to be seen. And he looked as if he didn't mean to be trifled with, and he won't. They found that out, those chaps did, last autumn, when he settled them in Gravel-pit lane" —

" What's up now ? "

The question was addressed aloud to his wife, who had just come downstairs with a receipted bill in one hand and money in the other.

" The chambermaid and the boots will wish there was something like that up every day," she answered. " He's going to-morrow, and has paid his bill to the end of the week : and this is what he has given them."

The landlord winked a general assent, but did not commit himself to an opinion.

Everard was then on his way, and Sandford, with the yeomanry pistols in his coat pockets, was following unobserved.

The Marquis Moncalvo had returned earlier than usual to his place of concealment. It was a little, low sitting-room with a papered ceiling, two chairs of shiny horsehair, a rush-bottomed arm-chair inclining forwards, a stuffed fox on the top of a highly varnished cupboard, two small oval mirrors, three coloured prints in mahogany frames hanging on a flowered paper, and a rickety round table on which was a tight cover of American cloth. Dinner had been brought in, and taken out untouched. A writing-case was before him, and three or four letters just sealed were on it. He was so much altered as to have passed out of average remembrance. There were streaks of grey in his hair, lines and hollows in his cheeks; but illness might have caused the one, and in the twilight you would scarcely have noticed the other. Those were not the changes that emphasised and quickened the action of time. The measure and mark of what he had become was to be seen in the expression of black despair that possessed every feature. His face was pale, with a ghastly greyish hue pervading it like a shadow. His eyes had the appearance of looking inwards, as when the mind has no object beyond its own picture of itself. His lips were stiffly compressed, and their compression was continuous rather than fixed, indicating a forced action of the will, deliberate but not spontaneous. After a while the pressure of that inner force compelled utterance, and he spoke his

thoughts in an undertone with excessive articulation.

"You are avenged at last," he said, "and the more so because you have not sought it. You will triumph in that, as in every other way. You have triumphed over me in strength, in generosity, in acuteness, in reputation, even in the turn of events. And now you will triumph in the rightful possession of all that you lost and I never gained. But this, the last, the greatest, the one thing without which you find all others powerless to give happiness, will not be your own work, it will be mine. I shall die owing you nothing."

He opened a pistol-case that lay on the table, and taking out a revolver, loaded it, muttering between his set teeth, "I am doomed, and it matters not how nor how soon it comes. There is no right and wrong for one who has no hope. A little sooner or a little later. The end must come, and the end must be—what I have made it. I go to meet the inevitable that is unseen, rather than face the inevitable that I see before me. I go to the unseen in despair—the last corrupted remains of the faith I once had; but I leave the visible, having cancelled my debt to him. I shall owe him nothing. Owe! What do I owe to *him*? Has he not ruined me in this world, and made the next a savage mockery? What is it to me that he acted without malice? What are his intentions to me? What do we know about the intentions of others, when we hardly know our own? We know nothing but facts, and only know them to be facts when they make us happy

or unhappy. I am ruined through him and his, ruined for ever; and shall I be so weakly enthusiastic as to make my despair his gain, his happiness, his triumph? Yet it must be. My will is not my own: it drives me on. I have seen her at last, seen her turn away from me with horror and contempt. I could bear the loss of my own reputation and the stain on my name, for I hate the world now, and am indifferent to its opinions: but that gesture of contempt from a woman, and she nominally my wife—that look of shrinking disgust, of bitter and womanly scorn, has made me intolerable to myself. That mockery of marriage marked me down as lost, and the end is Now.”

Colour came into his face, an unnatural light into his eyes, a strange kind of exhilaration into his mind and senses. He grasped the revolver, held it firmly before him a few moments, and had just begun to turn the muzzle deliberately round, when it was knocked on one side, wrenched out of his hand and thrown on the floor. The action had been so quick and overpowering that it was done before he became aware of any other presence than his own. Starting up, he rushed at the intruder blindly, was at once forced back into his chair, and saw Everard standing by him, the very embodiment of power and pity. He shrank from the impression, and for a moment looked away. Then he rose and said haughtily:

“You have taken me by surprise. Let the advantage be to you what it may be worth in your own estimation; but if you have the feelings of a gentleman, you will understand it to

mean that the world is not adapted to hold us both. Let me hear to-morrow that you understand what I have said. In the meantime do me the favour to go."

"Not till you have made up your mind to speak and act like a Christian," said Everard. "Sit down and listen, for I have a right to be heard, and I mean to be heard. I have just saved you from a shameful death and eternal perdition: in return you wish to take the life I risked for you. Had I not interfered when I did and as I did, you would by this time have appeared before Almighty God charged with the guilt of self-murder. What the result of that must be you know as well as I do. You would have been judged; and your body, awaiting its horrible reunion with a lost soul, would be lying in a room redolent of spirits and stale tobacco, to be examined by the coroner. I have saved you from a shameful death, and you wish to take my life. I have saved you from the certainty of eternal perdition, and you are trying to insure it for me. I spared your life when you were doing your utmost to kill me, and you seek my life when I have just risked it to save yours. I spared you while defending myself in the extremest heat of a just anger, and you insult me by insinuating that I have taken a cowardly advantage of you now. I have forgiven you—forgiven you at a cost that God alone knows—as black a deed of treachery as ever was committed, and you, who have nothing to forgive, cannot be satisfied as long as there are any remains of the life that you have ruined. You will not be kept waiting long.

Try, for your own sake, to moderate your malice while you can do so without shame and remorse."

"You have made me feel both," said the Marquis in a tone of excessive emotion. "All you have said is true, and you might have said much more with truth and justice. I have behaved as badly as any man could behave to another, and you have behaved like what you are, a hero and a saint. There is only one reparation in my power."

He stepped suddenly back, and passing by the corner of the table, made a dart at the revolver on the floor. Everard threw himself between, and again forced him back into the chair.

"You are over-excited," he said gently. "Sit still a while and hear me out. You owe me that."

"I do," gasped the Marquis, making no further resistance. "I owe you that and much more. I owe you the happiness of which I robbed you. Your generous interference has prevented the only reparation that is possible. Had you been less quick or less powerful, that nominal tie—that mockery of marriage, would have been broken, and she would be free. You are worthy of happiness—no one so much, and your happiness would be the means of making others happy. Nothing can save me now. Your efforts to do so are heroic, in the highest possible sense of the word, but they cannot prevail against the fate that I have made for myself."

"Nonsense! What you call fate is nothing but your own disordered will. The devil, of course,

tries to persuade you that you have no choice, for his business is to destroy souls as much as he can, and lies are his weapons ; but he cannot, unless you co-operate in the deception. You know, as well as you know anything, that a soul cannot be lost otherwise than by its own wilful fault, and therefore that the dark doom you imply is a solemn absurdity. God has preserved you twice in spite of yourself"—

"In spite of myself—yes. But it was you who"—

"And who insured my coming here soon enough, or even knowing that you were in the neighbourhood ? My horse was brought round a little before the time, and it happened that I was ready. But for that, I should have been too late. You want to make reparation, and you can, if you will, but not by making me the cause of your dying in mortal sin. Ask yourself whether any Christian man, however poor a specimen he may be, could accept such restitution as that."

"But what else can I do ? There is no other way of restoring what I have unjustly taken."

"Speak reasonably, or I shall be compelled to call in two doctors and a magistrate, that you may be taken care of, as having twice tried to commit suicide and expressed a determination to try again. To give what belongs to another, in order to restore something else, is not restitution, but robbery. If a man who had stolen a sum of money were to rob the Bank of England, in order to pay it, would you call that restitution ? And yet the robbery would be as nothing, compared with what you propose to do ; for the wealth of the British

Empire, which the Bank of England represents, is limited, but you would cheat Almighty God out of a soul that He has redeemed at an infinite price. Your life belongs to Him, and you have no right to take it. Our Lord was born in a stable, lived in poverty and contempt, suffered, taught, sweated blood in contemplating your sins, died in agony of a broken heart to save your soul; and you would deprive Him of it, of the right which He could command if He had not given you the high privilege of free will. Let me hear no more of this unworthy, this contemptible, this drivelling nonsense. You must come to Freville Chase. You must come now—with me. You want to make reparation for the evil that you have done, and would not have done if you had not been led away from the duties of the Faith. The only reparation you can make is to save your soul, and you know how to begin that. You know what you ought to do, and you long to do it; but the devil is putting all sorts of excuses into your mind, and I don't mean him to succeed, if I can help it. One effort and you will have freed yourself. That effort you can and must make. I will not leave you till you have."

"Ask me to do something that is possible. I cannot go to Freville Chase, and I cannot be reconciled to the Church. It is too late."

"Then you refuse to make the only possible reparation, the reparation that I ask for and you promised?"

"No—don't say that I refuse. I am too late, and therefore it is impossible. I have gone too far: I have abandoned the Faith too long. In

such dispositions as mine, it would be mere hypocrisy to go through the form of being reconciled to the Church."

"Of course—and sacrilege too, if you wilfully persist in them, against knowledge and conscience, but not otherwise. And what has that to do with your coming to Freville Chase?"

"Everything; for your object in asking me there is to bring me back into the Church, and as that cannot be, I should only place you in a most painful and equivocal position for nothing."

"Leave me to manage the position. I ask you to come, and I don't ask you to do impossibilities."

"I beg you to ask me something else, anything else that I can do for your sake. Think for a moment. Consider Hubert."

"Hubert and Elfrida are at Beynham. Tell me when you will come, and I will meet you along the avenue, and send the fly on with your luggage, so that no one may see you arrive. Come! Let me see you begin to pack up. I will help you to do it. Give me a start of ten minutes, and you will find me in the avenue."

The Marquis again started up from his chair, but not as before. He stood quite still after he had risen, and the expression of his countenance was such as Everard had never yet seen in it.

"I will go to Freville Chase," he said. "You have fairly conquered me. I cannot resist you. Your noble forgiveness has overpowered me."

"Say rather, the grace of God and your own better feelings," answered Everard, unloading the

revolver and putting it into its case. "If I have done anything to encourage you, well!—so much the better for us both. Suppose you pack a few things, and let me send for the rest in the morning. I had better get home soon."

In a few minutes he ordered the fly, and mounted the brown mare. The night was dark, and the loose flints were many, but he reached home in time to meet the Marquis in the avenue. He little thought that Sandford, with the yeomanry pistols in his pockets, had followed him to the Red Lion, stood outside the door during his interview with the Marquis, and followed him back to Freville Chase.

Seeing Mrs. Roland in the shadow of the *portière*, as they passed through the hall, he left the Marquis in the gallery and went back.

"Don't be frightened," he said. "I found him in despair, attempting his own life. I prevented it twice, and got him to listen, after a great deal of trouble. In charity I couldn't do less than bring him here and try to get him to his duties—particularly after the message he sent me by Dr. Ranston."

"Yes, my lord, if you were somebody else and all was different," said Mrs. Roland.

"But, you see, there was nobody else, and I felt bound to do it."

"Not to go after him, at such a risk to everybody, riding off to Exbourne at this time of night," she answered in a tone of respectful admiration. "It was more than anyone else would have done, to let him come inside the house at all, when there are plenty of places where he could go to

his duties. It's ever so much worse than going to Beynham, ever so much. I wish to goodness you had gone there."

"But if I had, he would have shot himself. He tried hard to do so, and would, if I had not been stronger than he is."

"So much the worse—to give you all that exertion just now."

"But I assure you that I don't feel the worse for it. I had more talking to do than anything else."

"Well, my lord, it can't be helped, I suppose; but I hope you won't take any more trouble about him now, nor see much of him. I am sure he will have enough to do to prepare for confession, after all these years and what he has done."

"Yes, but I am afraid he is not ready for that yet."

"Let Father Merivale look to that, and see whether he means anything or not, and get rid of him if he doesn't. Promise me, my lord, that you won't be with him much."

"I can hardly promise that; but he can do me no harm now. And if you saw what a wretched state he is in, you would pity him—you couldn't help it."

"I don't deny that, my lord. Who wouldn't pity a poor perishing soul? But it happens at a bad time, just when you are alone."

"If I had not been alone he wouldn't have come."

"But there is no reason why you should be alone any longer, now that he is here."

"There is indeed—it would never do for my

brother to be here with him. He will be gone before they return from Beynham."

Mrs. Roland retired slowly, declining to make any admission. Everard went back to his guest, and found him pacing the gallery with quick irregular strides.

"Your noble conduct," said the Marquis, "has touched my heart more than there is power in words to express. It has made me come here against my will, and would, if it were possible, keep me here as long as you are alone. But you really must excuse me from staying beyond to-morrow morning. The recollections of this place are more than I can endure. But before I go, I wish to tell you some things about myself. They would not take me long to tell, for you know so much about them already; and if it were not so late"——

"Never mind that," said Everard, "I had rather hear it now."

"And I had rather say it now. There will be more time now than in the morning, for I must go early—I must, indeed. I beg you as a favour not to press me to stay. If I were naturally bad, I should stay, for it would be my best exculpation before the world: but I am not. I have been made bad, and I will tell you how."

"Just tell me one thing first—that is, if you can," said Everard. "Do you know anything about a letter that Hubert had last March, from Calabria?"

The Marquis's pale face crimsoned and then became paler than before.

"Didn't Lady Dytchley intimate to you that

he would be better out of the way for a time," said Everard, "and put some sort of pressure on you about the evidence that we were looking for? and wasn't the letter from Calabria written by the person who took leave to act for you on another occasion?"

"It was. Let me tell you the whole truth."

"Please, don't. I understand it all, and guessed it at the time. But I interrupted you. You were saying"——

"My father," said the Marquis, "died when I was a boy. I have no recollection of my mother. After leaving college, I fell under the poisonous influence that you know well, though it has never touched you. I never had anything to do with Italian Freemasonry, nor indeed with any; but through false friends, men whom I ought not to have known, I imbibed liberalism enough to destroy me. I neglected the practice of religion, became careless of its principles, of course fell away in morals, and spent so much money that in about three years I was in very embarrassing difficulties. That servant of mine was aware of it, and he knew that my sister had inherited a considerable sum of money from an uncle. He thought it a good opportunity for enriching himself at will by getting me into his power, and he succeeded. Unhappily I was absent a day and a half. The deed was done during that time. Had it been proposed to me it would never have been done; but, when I heard of it, the two nurses were leaving Alassio, taking Hubert with them, and then I gave that negative consent which has been my ruin. I argued with myself as a man

argues whose principles have been loosened at their foundations. Was I to follow them, only to make a terrible scandal, have the credit of being a frightened accomplice, and deprive Lord de Freville of an heir who, after all, was a Freville? My difficulties were pressing and immediate, and I tolerated the sophistry as people now tolerate the occupation of Rome—because it was an accomplished fact. While I hesitated the two nurses went away with the child, and I said, ‘It is too late now.’”

“And so it was at first,” said Everard. “By neglecting the practice of religion you had lost grace, and by losing grace you had weakened your defences. A Catholic who has rejected the supernatural has paralysed the natural virtues in him, and has less power of resistance than a heathen. All the misfortunes that you have brought on yourself and on others came from that. I will venture to say that by that time you couldn’t help acting as you did. Your will was unequal to the occasion, simply because you had made it so. You know that I am telling you the truth: you have virtually confessed it: yet you go on consenting to the cause, hugging your chains, letting yourself be dragged on to perdition with your eyes open. So long as you continue consenting to the sole and certain cause of all that you so bitterly and with every reason regret, so long you are consenting to the effects, defending them, making them your own, morally repeating them. Just think of that, think it over quietly at your leisure, before you decide on leaving this house to-morrow morning and throwing away

what may be, and probably is, your last opportunity."

The Marquis drew a quick breath, and a deeper shade of melancholy came over his brow; but he evaded the question.

"You are right," he said. "All the misfortunes that I have brought on myself and on others came from that one unpardonable hesitation."

"I didn't say that," said Everard. "I said that the hesitation and its consequences came from your giving up the practice of religion."

"I had no peace after that day," said the Marquis, "for it was too late to undo what I had done; yet it haunted me day and night. I was in his power, and had to tolerate his villanous attempt in the lane. I was in the power of Charlotte Wilcox, and never knew when or how she might justifiably use that power. Unable to recover myself, I fell lower, but not contentedly. I longed and aspired after better things always—it was partly the cause of what followed. I wish you to know all about that, without any reservation."

"Spare yourself and me," interposed Everard. "I understand it all. Let us talk of something else—anything else."

"Yes. Only let me say that I misunderstood you about it."

"I know—I understand it all."

"I thought so. I only wish to say that, had I known what I now know about you, I should not have been led into the shameful act of treachery that makes me hate myself. Lady Dytechley deceived me—you *must* hear that."

"There is no necessity for it. I know enough, and too much."

"Yes, but not what she said to *me*. She said that the marriage never should be, no matter what she did or went through to prevent it. She said neither cared for the other really, and that you had virtually acknowledged"——

"I know exactly what she would have said. I know it as well as if I had been present. But I am afraid that I must say good-night. I hope you will think better of your determination to go early to-morrow morning."

"I would, if it were possible. Don't, I entreat you, give me the pain of refusing"——

"I wish to save you the pain of *having* refused," said Everard, ringing the bell. "My life hangs on a very slight thread. I can't take you to your room, for they won't let me go upstairs. You mustn't mistake muscular strength for soundness. I haven't got over the illness I had in Rome—I never shall, and I am liable to die suddenly at any moment. Five doctors have told me so. Dr. Ranston even forbids my going to Beynham."

The Marquis trembled and turned very pale.

"I never heard that till now," he said—"now, when I know that I am the cause—now, when I have learned at last what you are and what I have done. The sight of me—my presence here *must* be dangerous to you. It *must*. Let me go at once—to-night."

"Not if I can by any legitimate means induce you to remain. The best thing you can do for me is to stay, and think, and look into yourself, and pray hard. Pray for me if you won't for yourself. And now, once more, good-night."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

MUBERT and Elfrida were detained at Beynham nearly a week. On the fifth morning at eight o'clock they went to hear Mass in the domestic chapel hastily fitted up for the late Lord de Freville, who had, more than once, been carried into it, and on the day of his death received the Holy Viaticum soon after Mass was said there. As the little church was still in progress, this chapel-room was used for the mission. There was no resident priest yet, but one came from a distance on Sundays and days of obligation, and occasionally at other times. It was a large room, originally intended for a ball-room, but left unfinished. The ceiling was carved, but the walls were still of bare brick, and three of the five windows were bricked up. You entered through folding-doors, out of a large drawing-room. One bricked-up window was at the further end: the two others were on the left side near the entrance. Of the two that were open and finished, one was half-way down the room, the other threw light on the altar.

As a chapel it impressed you with the idea of solemnity, thoroughness and preparation. The walls were covered with cloth in the darker

parts, in the lighter with tapestry, near the altar with crimson velvet. The altar stood in a recess that formed a sort of sanctuary, and above it, against the bricked-up window, was a very good copy of Francia's *Pietà*, with a background of crimson velvet that hung in graceful drapery over the whole space of wall within. The crucifix was of ivory and ebony, the antependium of white satin, embroidered in gold and the five ecclesiastical colours. The floor of the recess was covered with a very thick Persian carpet. Facing the front row of chairs to the right was an Early Italian picture of our Blessed Lady, in an antique silver-chased frame, before which a lamp was burning. A subdued light, that melted into the shadow of the velvet drapery, made colour soft, outlines distinct. The whole effect was that of devotional solemnity, artistic truth, fitness of adaptation.

And these were almost the very words that Elfrida used when speaking of it as she passed through the large drawing-room on her way to hear Mass.

"I wish you had heard Everard's directions about it," said Hubert, "when I put the whole thing suddenly before him to settle off-hand, though he had hardly seen the room. I can't imagine why I never told you before, except that we have had so many other things to think of. When I told him what was wanted, and how soon, he said: 'First ask the Bishop, or it can't be done at all. Then have a plain oak altar made. I will write down the dimensions, and the village carpenter can make it. Then take that old Scriptural

tapestry from the inner drawing-room, and the cloth and velvet that was used on some occasion or other—I saw it in a lumber room. Put the tapestry where the light comes, and the cloth where it doesn't, and hang the velvet on the three walls of the recess where the altar must be. Get that fine copy of Francia's *Pietà*, and put it above the altar—it will show well on the crimson velvet. Don't be in a hurry about a statue of our Blessed Lady, or you will get something abominable; but take the picture I saw in his study (it has a chased silver frame) and hang it between the recess and the inner wall, with a lamp below on a bracket. Don't attempt Gothic in that Early Georgian room. An ivory crucifix will look best in that light with those surroundings, and a white satin antependium embroidered in the five ecclesiastical colours, lit up by a good deal of gold. You will find silver candlesticks in the house much more suitable than anything you are likely to pick up on short notice.' I followed his directions exactly, and the result has verified every word he said. I only wish he could see it."

Elfrida said nothing, for they were at the entrance, and the folding doors were open; but it came into her mind that this was the day after Everard's birthday—the anniversary of the day on which the settlements were to have been signed.

Hubert was not remembering the date at that moment, but he was oppressed by an overpowering wish to be at Freville Chase; and the wish grew into a distraction that tormented him half through the Mass. Towards the end of the Pre-

face he had a sudden impression that some one had entered the chapel and was walking by him. He looked up nervously and saw that it was Everard.

No sight could have been more startling, no event more improbable; but Everard it was, and he appeared to be no worse for coming. He passed close by them and, turning his head a little, stopped for a moment. It was but for a moment, yet in that short space of time Hubert had seen the beautiful smile and felt it upon him. Another moment and the Sanctus bell rang. Everard passed onwards into the shadow, through a ray of sunlight that glistened on his hair, and knelt on a prie-Dieu that stood in the shade of the two bricked-up windows.

"Just like him—after all, to come so," thought Hubert. "But to travel at night—and yet he looks no worse for it. He hasn't looked so well since"— At that moment the bell rang, bringing the question to a sudden and decisive end. After the consecration Hubert looked up again, and when the words *Nobis quoque peccatoribus* had been said, he touched Elfrida, pointing at the same time with his prayer-book to the spot where Everard was kneeling. She showed no surprise, and he, by reason of believing in her very much, went on with his prayers quietly, as if nothing particular had disturbed their course. After the blessing he looked up again and saw the chair empty.

"Come out at once, I implore you," he whispered. Elfrida looked surprised, but followed him out. "What can have become of him?" he said.

"Who? what do you mean?" she answered.

"I mean Everard, of course. He was at Mass. Didn't you see him?"

Elfrida made no answer, but the colour left her cheeks.

"I saw him as distinctly as I ever saw anything," said Hubert. "He looked at me. He must be here. Did no one see him come?"

These words were addressed to the servants who were leaving the chapel.

Elfrida burst into tears, and taking his arm, said:

"We must go back directly. He is not here, or I should have seen him—must have seen him."

They hurried on.

"We must catch the half-past nine train," said Hubert, his voice trembling so much that he could hardly speak. "Why did we come here?"——

They caught the train, and reached Freville Chase soon after twelve o'clock.

When they drove into the courtyard, Elfrida's fortitude began to give way, but without any external sign, except a slight constraint that Hubert would not have perceived if they had been less to each other than they were. That constraint, or rather tension, showed itself even more in him than in her. His eyes avoided every object. His mouth was fixedly closed, as if he were repressing utterance, lest it should bring a dreaded truth nearer. When the fly stopped he took her hand, held it in his for a moment, and springing out, rushed headlong into the house. The first living object he saw was the Marquis Moncalvo, coming through the door that led to the chapel.

"Treacherous, ill-omened apostate!" muttered Hubert. "Must I bear this because my mother had the misfortune of being your sister?"

But he looked again, saw the abominated countenance more distinctly, and paused in amazement, finding no warrant there for the anger that he knew to be just. The Marquis came forward, and said in a low voice:

"Yes! treacherous, an apostate, and of evil omen: yet I ask you to endure my presence a little while for his sake. I virtually killed him, and he sought me out, saved me from suicide, brought me here, made me be reconciled to the Church. He owed his death to me: I owe my life and more than my life to him. I deceived him, and he taught me to undeceive myself. He died as he had lived. I live to die as I have not lived. I owe both life and hope to him. That was his last work."

Elfrida made one final effort to control the expression of her immense grief, and broke down in the struggle. She sobbed without restraint, and tottered helplessly.

"Come with me," said Mrs. Roland, who had heard the sound of carriage-wheels while in the chapel, and was now standing behind them unobserved. "Come with me," she repeated; and strong in the strength of noble service, she bore her away.

Hubert bowed his head and went on.

"When was it?" he said in a hoarse voice, "and where, and how?"

The Marquis began to answer, but his voice failed more than once. At last he said:

"This morning, about a quarter past eight o'clock. I telegraphed for you as soon as possible, but I did not expect you to arrive so soon. I had been awakened very early by the sound of a great bell that seemed as if it came from the top of the tower. I supposed that it was ringing for his birthday, which, if I remember rightly, is to-day. I went down to the chapel some time before Mass, and I found him already there. He went to Holy Communion, and I did so too, owing to him. Just after the last Gospel I saw him get up and try to walk down the aisle. I followed, and supported him till we came into the gallery. Then he stood for a moment in front of the western bay, and looked out. A great change had come over his countenance. The traces of pain and sorrow were no longer there. I had never before seen him look happy. I have never seen any one look as he did then. Directly afterwards I felt him lean heavily on my arm. I laid him on a sofa, and then Father Merivale came in"——

"Where is he now? show me."

"There—in the chapel."

The Marquis drew back reverently, and Hubert passed on alone.

The chapel was nearly full. All the servants, except Mrs. Roland, were there, nearly all the congregation, and several people from a distance, many of them belonging to Netherwood. Sir Richard was there, but so aged and altered that you might have doubted his identity.

Hubert saw none of them. When he opened the door he had a sudden impression of people and lights, but only one object of sight. He only

saw Everard, lying as if asleep, scarcely paler than when he had seen him last, and so life-like in expression that the reality of his death seemed at first sight incredible. He wore the black velvet clothes in which he had died. The rosary that he had always carried about him was twined round his fingers. The crossed hands and the crucifix that glittered on his breast were the only immediate evidences that he was dead.

His features had lost none of their living beauty. Sometimes the lips appeared to smile as the flicker of the tall wax-tapers rose and fell, lighting up the crimson velvet cushion under his head and glistening on the draperies of white satin brocaded with gold that covered the couch where they had laid him. One expression only had left him, one not essentially his, but acquired and separable—that of accepted suffering, which had passed away with the trials that made it. Where it had once been peace now reigned, profound and permanent.

The crowd that knelt around in the cleared space moved a little way back when Hubert came in. Only one remained. It was Sandford, who, with his grey head bowed down over the body of Everard, was unconscious of any other human presence.

Hubert fell forward on his knees close to the pillow, and gazing intently, doubted for a moment. For a moment only. The next he felt and saw that this was indeed death. He felt it in the icy cold of the smooth forehead and the crossed hands; he saw it in the straight lines of

the brow, in the fixity of outline, in the absolute stillness, but most of all in the upward look of the closed eyes, and the immense, the complete humility they expressed, as if the vision which no man may behold and live had opened out to the gaze of the soul at the moment of separation from the body.

He saw that, and nothing but that. He was not even aware that Ida had just come in, though she knelt beside him. Stiffened and stupefied, he could neither pray nor make any effort, nor feel his inability to do so. Even the action of grief was suspended, till Everard's favourite deer-hound, who had slipped in by stealth, came to the opposite side of the couch, and, after resting his muzzle on the coverlet for a while, put his paw on the dead hand of his master, whining piteously.

This touch of nature broke him down. He staggered up to the spot, coaxed the poor dog away out of the chapel, and fell back into the arms of Father Merivale, who had watched and followed him.

The Marquis, wishing to return, had passed through the courtyard to the principal door, and seeing that Hubert was not there, came in. As Ida's face was turned from him, and her head bent down, they were not aware of each other's presence till he knelt by her side. He saw her, and shrank back appalled, as if the living and the dead were bearing witness together against him. She saw him, and nerved herself up for an heroic effort.

"Stay!" she said in a penetrating whisper.

"I must speak, and you must listen. Here, in the presence of God, and in the presence of him whom we both betrayed, I forgive you as I hope to be forgiven, and I ask you to forgive me the wrong I have done you. Let our last meeting be here. Let us part in these dispositions."

He said nothing, but inclined his head with a reverence and humility more expressive than words. A few minutes afterwards he rose and knelt further off.

Hubert had broken down as a man of strong will and vigorous constitution does when his overstrained forces give way; but as soon as animation was restored, he again became unnaturally calm, and went with Father Merivale into the gallery.

"I want to hear about him," he said, walking up to the writing-table in the southern bay. "It almost seems as if he had known what would be. There are no letters or papers lying about. Everything is in order. It all looks finished and put away."

"I think he did almost know—had a strong impression. Yesterday evening I was alone with him for some time. The Marquis Moncalvo had gone to the chapel. At dinner he had been quite himself, and more than himself—brilliant, original, inexhaustible. When the Marquis left the room, he smiled as of old—the wonderful smile that nobody who ever saw could forget, and said to me :

"'I rattled away to keep his attention off himself, till he had to prepare for confession.'

"'You did wisely and well,' I said, 'you have done wonders. I had no hopes of him at first.'

" 'I suppose not,' he said absently. 'But people see the nearness of the end more clearly in others than in themselves; and sight is suggestive.'

"I made no answer, for I thought it better that he should be quiet. Presently I heard him say:

" 'Better as it is—better for him perhaps.'

"I asked him what was better.

" 'I was wishing that Hubert could be here,' he said, 'but it can't be. He has been the best brother that any man ever had, in every way and invariably.'

"I asked him if he had any particular reason for wanting you sooner than you were expected. He said, 'None—except that I feel my life to be so very uncertain;' and then he asked me to give you a message from him if he should die while you were away. He said, 'Tell him that I wished very much to have seen him once more—to have had him near me then. Tell him that a truer friend or a better brother than himself could not be. Tell him that he has been the greatest possible comfort to me always—especially so in troubles that have been, at any rate, as much as I could bear—and that I have unlimited confidence in him for the future. And I ask you,' he said, 'in the event of my dying while he is away, to take the gold crucifix that hangs on a chain round my neck, and give it to him yourself as soon as you can, and say that I wish him to wear it constantly, as I have, and my father before me. He knows it all, for I told him of it in Rome. There is, as you know, a piece of the True Cross inside.'

"I was alarmed, and asked him to let me

telegraph for you. His face brightened for a moment, but then he begged me not, on account of the Marquis; and expressed this heroic resolution as lightly as if it were nothing. He only said, 'No, please don't. One would like to finish up that business without giving any distractions to the person most concerned.' Then a faint colour came into his cheeks and faded away as quickly. 'I hope you will see Ida,' he said, 'and say what you can to comfort her. She will not live to require it long. Try to see her as soon as you can.' I pressed him again to let me telegraph for you, but he shook his head. 'No,' he said. 'It is better not until all is completed. He goes the day after to-morrow, and they come back the same day.' He then spoke of other things, and soon after I had to go to the chapel. When I returned he had gone to his room. Mass was at half-past seven this morning, because I had to go out early. He received Holy Communion with the Marquis. They were the only two. It was his last act. As I was coming down the altar steps after Mass, I saw him get up and leave the chapel. He was paler than I had yet seen him, and walked with evident effort. The Marquis gave him his arm, and went out with him. I followed as soon as I had unvested, bringing the holy oils with me (for I dreaded the worst), and found him lying on that sofa near the western window. He was evidently dying. When I came near he smiled, and tried to give me his hand. I administered the last rites at once. He remained conscious, I think, all the time, and then seemed asleep. For a

while I fancied that I had been mistaken—that he might recover as he had before. I felt his pulse. It had stopped. I took the crucifix from him, as he had wished. Here it is. Wear it and be like him.”

Hubert took the crucifix, kissed it with exceeding reverence, and tried to speak, but could not. He simply sobbed like a child, while tears burst from his eyes in a burning torrent. “I can’t help it,” he said, turning away.

“Don’t try to help it,” said Father Merivale. “Give way to it, or you will break down; and you must not do that. You cannot be spared.”

“Thank you. Stay with me a little if you can. I never felt helpless before; but I do now, and only you can help me.”

“I will, with all my heart, and as long as you like.”

Father Merivale remained there nearly two hours. Hubert then left the room to go again into the chapel.

Later in the afternoon Dr. Ranston arrived, ignorant of what had happened. When he heard it he turned very pale, and said :

“This is indeed a great grief, an irremediable loss. I have been always afraid of it. But are you sure? Has any one attended him? Show me, please—show me where he is.”

The side door was opened for him and he hurried on.

When he entered the chapel a great fear came over him. He had seen death many times, but never before realised what that invisible severance of soul and body implies. Where was the

life of that which was now lifeless? Where was the unseen thing, the incorporeal *ens*, which a few hours ago was the substantial form of that beautiful body, informed it, made it obedient to a higher law, and brought from those lips, now smiling in holy death, words of wisdom, of beauty, of intellectual power? Where was that now? What had become of it? What did he know with any certainty about it? What authority had he for any belief or opinion concerning it, beyond that of his own disbelief in the annihilation of what has once come into being? That was the amount of certainty which he found in himself now, when the mystery of death was before him for the first time as the one personal question of life. Emotional theories melted away like drops of water in a furnace. Grounds of belief, that seemed sufficient as long as they were not examined and had nothing to support, fell in at the first pressure. He felt a sudden and total want of belief, a strange and paradoxical responsibility for that want, a terrible sense of desolation and loss.

"If this that I dread is true," he thought, "unlimited negation is the only truth. But I cannot deny a thing unless I find it in my mind. How did the idea of the contrary get into my mind? Not out of nothing—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. We cannot create: we can only compose. There is an element of possibility in the wildest fable, and the impossibility of the whole consists mainly in disproportion between the means and the end. Untruth is disproportion, and there was no disproportion in his faith. I have borrowed this from

him, though he never said it to me in so many words. I had thought out many and important things before he was born, yet he taught me how to think; and when I try to think my way out of this horrible, this unlooked-for abyss of unbelief, I find myself imitating him, following him. I *will* follow him. If there is such a thing as objective truth in religion—and if there is not, then faith can be nothing more than emotional opinion, as mine has been—if there is objective truth in religion, it must of necessity be exclusive. If it is to be known by us—and there is no use in it without—it must have been entrusted to some authority, as the Gospel says it was. There is One and only One that clearly has claimed it from the outset and maintained its claim throughout, only One that shows even probable credentials, only One that has not been begun, set up, started, raised up out of a revolt from the original one, and founded on the assumption of its having been corrupted—which is equivalent to saying that the gates of hell have prevailed, that the Holy Ghost has not guided it to all truth, and therefore that the New Testament is a myth. Yes! Truth is in the Catholic Church, or God becomes the Unknown and Unknowable. The alternative is that, or absolute privation, hideously horrible. This is what he would have said; and there he lies, dead, yet as if alive, his soul reflected in his face. I have loved him as my own son, valued his friendship more than any distinction I ever gained, revered him as a complete human being, a being gifted with the highest qualities and the most exquisite proportion. Can it be

that what he lived for, died in, and bears impressed on his countenance even now, is but '*the baseless fabric of a vision?*'

'O death, made proud with pure and princely beauty!'

"Are you then the final destroyer of that which gives you a beauty not your own? If that is really the end for which the good strive, and struggle, and suffer, and hope, and aspire, and control their natural inclinations and do heroic deeds of charity, the pursuit of happiness is a delusion to all but the selfish and ignoble, who seek things that are in proportion with their own desires and may be obtained. But the desire for happiness is more deeply rooted in the higher instincts than in the lower. If the lower things are attainable under conditions, cannot the higher hope be realised under higher conditions? Both are implanted in us and have a perceptible connection, as master and servant. How can I know the truth? It is one thing to be intellectually convinced, another to realise the certainty of the unseen future as if we saw it. He who is there dead, yet in some manner living, yes! living—for all that he was cannot have passed into decaying matter—he would have said, 'Pray for light, and you will have it.' He *does* say that. It is written on his face—that smiles, and speaks, and says to me, 'I have passed into what may be your own future, if you will. Accept the grace that is offered—that you feel to be offered. Are you sure that it was not offered before? Can you expect it again? Accept it while it is yours.' I will, I will. I see now that it was not conviction I wanted, but *will*

—will to submit my own will to the Infinite Will. Beautiful child of the Universal Creator, I will, I will."

He knelt by the body of Everard, and prayed as he had never prayed before, never imagined that he could pray; yet he used no words and wanted none.

He had been there some time, how long he knew not, when Elfrida came into the chapel, and unconscious of his presence, taught him how dependent human strength sometimes is on a force naturally less than its own. She had come prepared for a great struggle and armed with a fixed resolution to control herself while there, yet no sooner was the reality before her eyes than she broke down without any struggle at all. Ida rose calmly, led her out, and spoke words of comfort with a strange power. Her voice was firm: her eyes were tearless.

"And I too," thought Dr. Ranston, "found myself dependent on a force not my own; but it was a force greater than my own, infinitely greater."

He then went into the house, and meeting them on his way, bowed as he passed. When he saw those tearless eyes, he said to himself, "She will follow him soon."

CHAPTER XLIX.

DAYS passed, one like another. Crowds came to the chapel each day : each day Ida came and went ; still maintaining the same terrible calmness when the tearless eyes looked on Everard for the last time.

And then another day went by and another ; and then she came again, to see all that remained of him on earth pass from among the things that are seen. She came early in the morning, and received Holy Communion within a few feet of the catafalque on which his coffin lay. When the Requiem Mass was sung she appeared to be calmer than before, though she stood in sight of his open grave. Every one was surprised, except Dr. Ranston. "She will follow him soon," he said again to himself when he saw her.

After the gospel there was a pause—not long, but marked, and then Father Merivale, walking slowly forward, stood near the altar rails to address the congregation. All eyes were turned on him except Ida's. The silence could be felt. He stood there awhile, mastering his emotion, and then with a perceptible effort began to speak. When he did so, every syllable was heard by every one present. He said :

"In the Epistle for the day on which Everard Lord de Freville was called to God, are these words: 'Blessed is the man that is found without blemish. . . . Who is he, and we will praise him? for he hath done wonderful things in his life. Who hath been tried . . . and made perfect, he shall have glory everlasting; he that could have transgressed and hath not transgressed, and could do evil things and hath not done them.' In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

"I see many sorrowful faces around me, and tearful eyes. It must needs be so. And yet in the greatness of our loss is to be found the greatness of the consolation; for surely, with a reasonable confidence, though in all humility, we may believe that on this day we shall have laid a saint to rest.

"I have watched his joyous infancy and his innocent childhood. I have seen him grow into early manhood, like some fair citron tree, beautiful before God and man, bearing the flowers and graces of youth with the fruits of a riper age.

"Almighty God saw him, loved him, called him. Great was his strength to endure, because great was his love of God, and love is the fulfilling of the law. However much he suffered, the serenity of his soul was unclouded, because the eye of Faith was directed towards things unseen. The centre of his soul was steadfast, because it was fixed on the Love Divine.

"That love had made him strong, and evil was permitted to sift him as wheat, that his victories over himself might be great, that he might attain

a higher perfection, that he might be the more fitted to leave this Valley of Tears. Yes, and for the sake of others also was he tried, as gold is refined in the fire, that by the brightness of his example and the tenderness of his charity many a poor soul might be won to God; for, as the Bishop of Birmingham says in his 'Ecclesiastical Discourses,' 'Love, but above all, love that suffers is that which saves what love has died to redeem.'

"Speaking of the sanctity of the priestly life, he says that the 'Lamp prepared for the Lord's anointed is the Light of Justice in the Flame of Charity,' and he refers to a passage of St. John Chrysostom, in which the Saint laments that the Christian laity in the world are distinguished from the monks by the name of secular, as if diligence in aiming at a holy life belonged to monks alone. 'Not so,' says the Saint, 'not so. The same precepts and counsels of holiness are given by our Lord to all men. The injunction to be perfect as our Heavenly Father is perfect was addressed to all.' 'This perfection,' as St. Thomas says, 'consists primarily in the love of God as the Supreme Good, and secondarily in the direction of this love to our neighbours, with whom God has associated us, and whom we should help with loving service towards the same Divine Beatitude. This twofold love, flowing from one principle of charity, is the perfection of life.' *

"And he, whom this day we lay to rest, may truly be said to have borne in his hand a lamp glowing with the light of justice and burning with the flame of charity. Though not a priest, he aimed

* "Ecclesiastical Discourses," by the Right Rev. Dr. Ullathorne, Bishop of Birmingham.

at sanctity: though not a monk, he strove after perfection.

"Desiring to love Him above all things 'Whom to love is justice,' he daily grew in that love. He grew more and more to love and follow Him Who is the Only and Divine Son of the Eternal Father, perfect in beauty, supreme in strength, of Whom the greatest human strength and beauty is but a faint and wavering reflection; Who overcame the malice of the Evil Will by bringing His sinless human will into conformity with the will of His Divine Nature; Who is the conqueror of all because, being the Perfection of manhood, He overcame the world by first overcoming Himself as man, and Who in the sufferings of that adorable humanity taught us, by His example, to love God and to suffer, if need be, for His sake.

"*O felix culpa!*" exclaims the Church on Holy Saturday. Happy fault of our first parents, because through their fall His infinite pity was not only manifested in the most stupendous act of love, but also brought down to the level of our finite understanding.

"That was the love and the knowledge through which he whose loss we mourn this day grew strong to do and strong to endure; so that when sorrow came upon his young life, sudden and crushing, he murmured not nor complained, but raising his eyes to Calvary, where his dear Lord had hung on the bitter cross for his sake, laboured with heroic courage and an humble heart to 'deserve the instruction of His patience.' Therefore of him we may truly say, *Fecit enim mirabilia in vita sua*—he hath done wonderful things in his life. 'Qui

potuit transgredi et non est transgressus: facere mala, et non fecit'—he who could have transgressed and hath not transgressed, and could do evil things and hath not done them.

"He has passed out of this world, but he will never pass out of our memories. He will never be less to us than he is now. And there is one thing that we can still do for him—though it may seem to us unnecessary in his case—I mean, to pray for his dear soul. Cease not to remember him daily in your prayers; for though to our eyes he seemed indeed to correspond so perfectly with the graces bestowed on him as not to need our prayers, yet those graces were so great, his gifts were so rare and so many, that it behoves us still to pray, 'For to whom much is given from them is much required.' And if, as I firmly believe, there has been no need of purgatory for him, still your prayers for him will not be lost. They will be garnered up in the treasure-house of the Church, and will help him to benefit in his death those whom he never forgot to pray for while he lived—the poor forgotten dead, who have no one to pray for them, and are still detained in a 'state of grief and suspended hopes.'

"In a little while you will have left this holy place where he so often knelt. You will see him no more with your bodily eyes, but you will see him still in your memory, in the recollection of all that he was amongst us and all that he did, and in the impression that will remain like a beautiful picture, engraven on your hearts.

"But that is not enough. You must try to imitate his example, as far as may be. Your means of usefulness may be different from his, and

your powers, and your nature, and your gifts, and the trials that will try you; but however much these may differ from his, you may, if you will, be guided by the same principle that guided him. That principle is to do the Will of God for the love of God, and because it is His Will. In this we have the beginning and the completion of a rare example. By this he has done wonderful things in his life."

His voice failed, and he turned away almost abruptly. Suppressed sobs broke the silence, till both were lost in the touching Gregorian tones that again filled the chapel.

Ida had remained quite still and apparently impassible. She had never changed her kneeling position, never made the slightest movement, never wavered in her stony calmness. When the coffin was lifted from the catafalque she rose and followed it closely, but the tearless eyes were as if they saw not. Probably no one noticed her then, except Dr. Ranston. He did, and walked by her side. A few moments more, and the coffin was lowered into the grave, which, by permission, was inside the chapel, near the Lady Altar. And then the last scene of all—that moment never to be forgotten by those who have felt what it is—when the last sensible impressions connected with what we have most loved, is a creaking and a heavy thud, and a drawing up of cords and the tramp of feet.

She stood by to the end. No one noticed her then—not even Dr. Ranston, so great was the grief of all, until they heard a little rustling noise where she had stood, as if she were quietly moving away,

and on looking up, they saw her sink, rather than fall to the ground. Dr. Ranston, being near, was just in time to save her head from coming in contact with the marble pavement. Elfrida ran to the spot.

"I should have attended more to her," she said; "I ought to have seen"—

"It would have been of no avail," said Dr. Ranston. "There is pressure on the brain—I felt convinced that there was as soon as I saw her this morning."

"But is there any hope? Can you do anything for her? If you could only bring her to herself, that I might hear her speak once more"—

Hubert lifted her up reverently, carried her to the king's room, and laid her on the old state bed.

"It was his at the last," he said, "and it shall be hers—and," he added in a low voice, "if she dies here, she shall be laid by his side."

She was alive but quite insensible. The tearless eyes looked abstractedly into distance, as before, but their expression was more fixed and less intelligent. Her hands remained as they had fallen when he laid her down. They were very thin, and her whole body was so wasted away that she weighed little more than a child. He gently raised her head, and lifted from it the tumbled hat of black crape. Her golden hair fell from its fastenings, and by reason of its great length, rolled partly over her face. He smoothed it off with the tenderness of a woman, and quickly covering his face, burst into tears.

Father Merivale now came into the room, and stayed there, watching for signs of animation; but she remained insensible. Hubert and Elfrida

watched by her bedside all that night, and the next day, and the next night.

Sir Richard stayed at Freville Chase, and was with her nearly all that time. Lady Dytchley was not there. Since Everard's death she had shut herself up in her room, refusing to see any one.

On the third morning Dr. Ranston sent for Father Merivale.

"I have hoped against hope," he said, "that she would recover consciousness for a while. I have no hope of it now. You had better lose no time."

After receiving the Sacrament of Extreme Unction, however, she became conscious and spoke; but the signs of death were now evident.

"Hubert, where are you?" she said; "come nearer. Give me your hand. You have been so wise and so good about Everard all through, and so wonderfully kind to me. I ask the forgiveness and the prayers of all whom I have injured—and that means all this household—but you the most, and then of Elfrida, and then of Mrs. Roland. Where is she? And of all, all—tell them all—and of my father and of my mother, and of one who alone has need of forgiveness from me. Tell him that I do forgive him from my heart. I told him so in the chapel by the side of Everard; but tell him so when I am dead, and ask his—for I wronged even him. And Hubert, take care of my poor mother; see her as much as you can, and try to comfort her. You can do it better than any one, for you have grown so like Everard lately, so very like, that she will believe what you say. God bless you! Pray for me."

He took her hand and kissed it, saying—"We must pray for each other. I shall have a great responsibility."

His voice was faint and broken. Tears rolled over the wasted hand that he held.


"And now," she said, "leave me a little while with Father Merivale."

When they returned she was dying. Presently a radiant smile passed over her face, and she said, "Yes it is Everard. He is waiting for me, there in glistening white and others with him."

Her voice was becoming weaker and less distinct. Hubert could only just catch the sound of these words:—"Jesus my Saviour, my God Jesus" Then her lips moved still, as if she were trying to pronounce again the most Holy Name, but no sound came from them. Suddenly she raised her arms a little, and stretched them out like a child, while her eyes appeared to look through the dimness that was gathering round them. In another moment her arms fell, her eyes lost their light, and she breathed no more.

"God rest her soul!" said Father Merivale. "Be comforted. She has passed from sorrows greater than she could bear and live. She has died in dispositions worthy of him whose wife she was fitted to be. In saying that, I have said all. Do not grieve—at least not for her. Life had become a question of weeks or months, lived through in pain of earthly loss too great for endurance. Her death is in harmony with her preparation for it—full of consolation for us all."

CHAPTER L.

N the following Saturday Ida was laid by the side of Everard, near the altar of Our Lady. A few hours later on the same day, De Beaufoy and Lady Fyfield came to Hazeley, where they had been expected some time before. They had been at Lourdes, and come home through Brittany, so that even the news of Everard's death had not reached them. Sherborne was not at home, nor Mrs. Sherborne, nor Mrs. Atherstone, but they arrived soon afterwards, and came into the library together, dressed in deep mourning.

"What has happened? I have heard nothing," said De Beaufoy. "Is he dead—I mean De Freville?"

"Yes, he is gone," answered Mrs. Atherstone, "and she too. He is gone, and the world is the poorer for his loss. He was buried ten days ago, and to-day we have seen Ida laid in the same grave. Little more than a year ago we were talking about them in this very room. That was the beginning, and soon afterwards there was the beginning of the end. We have to-day seen the end. A more wretched waste, a more destructive misuse of responsibility, a more fearful instance of what a

man possessing good qualities can sink to, if he loses the grace of God, never startled the experience of the world. And yet the three people who deprived society of one whose remarkable qualities made holiness attractive even to the irreligious—the three people who did this amount of mischief—are not wicked. A mixed marriage has really been the cause of it all. If Sir Richard and Lady Dytchley had both been Catholics, or both Protestants, it could not have happened. She would not have had the temptation to deceive herself that she had.”

“I feel the profoundest pity for poor Sir Richard, who is quite broken down,” said Sherborne, “and if possible, still more for Lady Dytchley, who has nothing whatever to comfort her. The doctors can’t make out what is the matter. She sits all day long on a sofa in her room with her back to the window, doing nothing and hardly speaking when spoken to. She won’t go downstairs, and says she can’t. Sir Richard tried to persuade her to go out, and get some air, but she wouldn’t hear of it, and kept on repeating, “No, no! I won’t. I can’t pass by the library, where I saw him for the last time before I went abroad on that dreadful journey. I see him now as he stood there, and hear his voice. I can’t go past that door. ‘Don’t ask me. Don’t speak to me.’ She has been in that state ever since he died. They have been afraid to tell her of her daughter’s death.”

“Ida,” said Mrs. Atherstone, “asked Lord de Freville, when she was dying, to look after and comfort her mother. She said he had grown so

like his brother, that he would have more effect than any one else; and so he has—startlingly like. Poor dear, Ida! The last days of her life were an example for all of us. Everything I saw that day and to-day was a lesson. The character of the man and the traditions of the house were written on the countenances of the servants.”

“As long as I can remember,” said Sherborne, “that house bore the stamp of feudalism in the higher acceptation of the term. The servants were and are a part of the family, not a separate caste agreeing to the terms of a contract.

“One can see it, and a beautiful sight it is. There is nothing nobler than service of that kind. It can’t be bought. It has no proportionate value in money. It doesn’t represent the value of money.”

“No, indeed. I have a respect for Mrs. Roland that amounts to reverence. Tell me. Was there any immediate cause of his death?”

“He saved the Marquis Moncalvo’s life by sheer pluck and strength,” said Sherborne, “and at considerable risk, when the wretched man was trying to commit suicide, and he took him to Freville Chase and brought him back to his duties. That was enough to account for it, in his state of health, when excitement of any kind was forbidden. But the real mischief was done all at once in Rome. It was the sudden and tremendous act of self-repression. You know the circumstances.”

“I do,” said De Beaufoy. “It was enough to kill the soundest man. The more there was in him the worse it would be. In his position, I don’t

know how I could have grasped the fact that self-control was a duty at all. His own betrothed wife was there. The deception was evident. He was attacked savagely. If he had forgotten to let go, no one would have blamed him. The result of that grip would only have been the natural consequence of a life-and-death struggle, in which he, being the strongest, had the best of it. The question would have settled itself without any act of his, other than one of self-defence. That he should have been able to think of anything else at such a moment, and grapple successfully with all the strongest instincts of outraged human nature, in the space of a second or two, is a marvel, and makes one feel how hard a thing heroic virtue is to practise."

"Yes," said Sherborne. "It makes one feel very small, if one applies the case and the probabilities to oneself. I don't know which is the grandest—that or his latest act."

"Such an example," said Mrs. Atherstone, "of a man living in the world, who was, in the best sense of the term, a man of the world, appeals practically to all of us. There are instances enough at this very time, of heroic virtue in the clergy and religious orders, if people will take the least possible trouble to look for them; but an example *in* the world appeals directly to us who are living in it. One can't say, 'These are things of the higher life, to which God has not called me.' There it is before us—a model whose principles we can and ought to follow, however differently we may be tried and gifted: for his principle was simply to do the Will of God as he

found it, and in doing no more than was his bare duty to do, he made bare acts of duty heroic."

"I think you are going a little too far there," said De Beaufoy. "Surely when he went out of his way to find the Marquis Moncalvo, he went a good deal beyond bare duty."

"Not beyond his own standard of duty, which is what we must judge him by. He knew, or rather had good grounds for supposing, that the Marquis was in a desperate state of mind—utterly disappointed, humbled, crushed, perishing of despair—and that no one but himself could have a chance of saving him. Is it beyond the line of bare duty to save a soul that is perishing almost at your gates? I think not. Look again at what he did in Rome, and consider what he would have done then, if he had not done just what he did. Was it more than duty to abstain from that? Go through the whole of his career, as far as we know about him, and you will find it summed up in the words quoted by Father Merivale, '*Qui potuit transgredi et non est transgressus, facere mala et non fecit.*'"

"You are right, as I have always found you," said De Beaufoy. "It was all bare duty, in the strict sense of the term. And yet the thing was, in each case, as hard to do as if he had gone beyond the line of duty."

"Yes, and perhaps much harder to reach than many things beyond it would have been. His trials were as hard to flesh and blood as they could well be; and yet we should all of us feel called upon to do as he did, if we were given the same. In that lies the real value of what he did.

First, it appeals to the consciences of people in every position of life. Secondly, flesh and blood can sympathise with it, and realise the possibility of doing great things if called upon to do them. Thirdly, it shows what can be done by the power of will energising under obedience to the highest law, in opposition to its own impulses."

"As to the trials themselves," said Sherborne, "they were virtually as old as fallen human nature. Given the accidental concurrence of wishes and opportunities, they were sure to follow as they did. There was nothing original in them, except their composition, which depended partly on the way in which they occurred, but mainly on him. He made them his own, like a great painter, by his way of treating them."

"Precisely," said Mrs. Atherstone; "and if you run your mind over the course of his latter life, you will find that when besieged by temptations fearfully strong and deceptive, he did what he was called to do about them. '*Potuit transgredi et non est transgressus, facere mala et non fecit.*' But just reverse the facts, and suppose him to have not acted as he did. What would those passages in his life look like then? At once the duty becomes apparent. I am not detracting anything from his merit—I admire him more than I can express—but only showing what we all know, that to do our bare duty well is often the hardest thing we could have set before us; and that his having it set before him was the best proof of what Almighty God, Who never requires more than we can do, knew him to be capable of. What an amount of will is implied

in the acts we have been speaking of—and not only of will, but of cultivated will! If his will had not been trained like the muscles of an athlete, it never could have borne the strain."

"Where is he buried?" said De Beaufoy. "I must say a *De Profundis* over his grave before I go home, though I feel sure that he doesn't need it. If he did, it would be a bad look-out for most of us."

"In the chapel," said Sherborne. "They got permission for that. A monument has been designed already. There will be a recumbent figure on it. The face is to be copied from a cast that was taken after his death."

"Was the Freville bell heard? I don't pretend to say what it is; but I certainly heard it myself, six-and-twenty years ago."

"I didn't like to ask any one at Freville Chase about it so soon," said Mrs. Sherborne, "but several people have told me that it was distinctly heard ringing far away over the Chase when he was taken ill in Rome, and again about two months before his death. I have often thought since of the old prophecy that I copied out of the muniment-room when I was a child. You remember the second line:—

When the knell is heard of a dying race.

He was supposed, for a time, as you know, to be the last of the Frevilles."

"Certainly," said De Beaufoy, "the fulfilment, or whatever one may call it, is curiously correct. I don't know what the proper definition of a broken heart is, but he died of something as

much like it as one can imagine. By his charity he won the soul of the Marquis Moncalvo, who was the cause of his death in that way. Then again, the race would have died out, if Hubert Freville had not turned out to be his brother, who had been practically lost."

"Lost, as his brother," said Mrs. Atherstone; "lost even as the owner of a name. And the photograph that proved his identity was sent by a stranger—the Italian woman. Lastly, Everard Lord de Freville has gone to his reward, having given Life, the True Life, to Freville Chase, by bringing its present owner and his wife into the One True Fold. He certainly would do for a hero of romance. One can fancy such men as he fighting in the Holy Wars under the Pio Buglione. He lives in the memory of all who are not quite unworthy of having known him, and the impression he has left on our hearts will make us remember those old lines carved in the muni-ment-room :—

'Whenn a Soule ys wonne by ye harte ytt hath ybrokenne
and ye knelle ys herde of a dyinge Race,
ye looste shall wygne by ye Strayngere hyr tokenne,
and ye Dedde give Lyfe unto Frevyle Chase.'

THE END.

